CHAPTER – 2

Ethnography of the Karbis

The Tribe:

The Karbis (Mikirs) are numerous and reside in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District, the North Cachar Hills Autonomous District, the district of Cachar, Sonitpur, Sibsagar, Golaghat, Morigaon and Kamrup of Assam, the district of Papumpare in Arunachal Pradesh and the Ri-Bhoi district, Jaintia Hill district and East Khasi hills district of Meghalaya. At one time they also settle in the Jiribam Sub-division of Manipur and Nagaland. The Karbis are also known to have settled in Sylhet district of Bangladesh. Few hamlets are located in Tibet/China.[1] In the Year 1972, there came a report of about 60-70 Karbi families residing in Myanmar (Burma) at a place called Tahan which is a day's journey from Yangoon (Rangoon) the capital city.[2] After the creation of the district in 1951, there was a wave of Exodus and now, the bulk of the population is found in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District.

Edward Tuite Dalton in his 'Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal' writes, "Adjoining the Kukis on the Kopili River and occupying all the hilly portion of the Nowgong District almost to the Brahmaputra, we next meet with the Mikir Tribe, who hold etymologically a very isolated position. According to their own legend, they were driven by the Kacharis from what is called Tolaram's Country between Nowgong and Kachar, and sought refuge in Jaintia, but not been satisfied with their reception, they placed themselves under the Rajas of Assam and have ever since peacefully occupied the hill country in which they are now settled. It is said that, they were disarmed or maid to forswear the use arms by the Assam Government and this is assigned as the cause of their disposion, which makes them good subjects, but exposes them to the attacts of their more warlike neighbours.[3]

The Geographical location of the Karbis (Mikirs) was reported in the Census of Assam for 1881 by C.J. Lyall.[4] The report runs as follows, "The country which from its geographical

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1. *Longchor newsmagazine*, Diphu, Editor, Sing Timung, Konok Associates, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, March, 2002.
2. An interview with Sri Barnabas Rongpi Diphu, Rongthe-ang, Date-5/10/ 2006.
3. Edward Tuite Dalton, *'Discriptive Ethnology of Bengal' (Asiatic Society of Bengal),* P-59, Year-1872
4. C.J. Lyall, *'Report on the Census of Assam'*, *1881, Chapter-VI*, P-78.

nomenclature, we should look upon as the home of the Mikir race is tolerably xtensive and includes a large area of hills in which there are few or no Mikirs. The characteristic elements of Mikir topographical nomenclature are *Lang,* river, water; *Langso,* small stream; *Inglong,* mountain; *Long,* stone; *Rong,* village; *Sar,* chief. In the isolated mountainous block which fills the triangle between the Brahmaputra on the North, the Dhanshiri Valley on the East and the Kopili and Kalang Valleys on the West, these names are found every where, as well as the southern part now inhabited by the Rengma Nagas from the hills across the Dhansiri as in the Northern portion included in the Nowgong District and known more particularly as the Mikir Hills. They are also found in considerable numbers to the south of the Langkher Valley in the mountains now inhabited by Kukis, Kutcha Nagas and Kacharis, e.g. *Langreng,* water of life; *Langting, Longlai,* etc. as far South as the courses of the Jhiri and Jinam. In the centre of North Cachar they are rarer but there is a considerable growth of Mikir names again to the West of this tract about the head waters of the Kapili and on the Southern face of the hills North of Badarpur. Mikirs also abound mixed with Lalungs on the Northern face of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and along the courses of the Kapili and the Umkhen Rivers. Across the Brahmaputra the topographical nomenclature shows no trace of them though there are a few recent colonies of the race in Darrang.

Geographical location of Karbi Anglong Autonomous District: The Karbi Anglong Autonomous District is located between latitudes $25^0 30''$ and $26^0 41''$ North and longitudes $92^0 7''$ and $93^0 52''$. The district is bounded on the North by Nagaon and Golaghat districts, on the South by the North Cachar hills district, on the East by Golaghat district and Nagaland and on the West by Meghalaya. The district happens to be the largest district in Assam covering a total geographical area of 10,434 square kilometer as per 1991 Census and 10,332 square Kilometer according to another source.[5] On the whole, the district covers 13.3 percent and 2.95 percent of the Assam's total area and total population respectively. Geographically, the district consists of the two hilly lobes which genetically belong to the Shillong plateau. The two lobes are separated by the Kopili Valley. The eastern lobe is dome shaped and approximately double the size of the western lobe. The important rivers of the district are Kopili and Dhansiri. The tributaries of Kopili are Karbi Langpi (Barapani), Umiam, Amreng, Kolonga, Jamuna, etc. while those of Dhansiri are Kaliani, Nambor, Deopani, Doigrung etc.

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5. Opcit, Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis*, P-2

The highest peak in the district is the Singhasan (1357 meters) located in East Karbi Anglong.[6]

Formation of the district in brief: The two hill districts of Assam were in fact two sub-divisions of the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district which was inaugurated on 17 November 1951 vide Government Notification No. TAD/R31/503/209 dated 3.11.50. It was created by carving out certain portions of Nowgong, erstwhile Sibsagar and United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district and the whole of North Cachar Sub-division of Cachar district. On 2nd February 1970, North Cachar was declared as a separate Civil district while the remaining portion i.e. Mikir Hills Sub-division was constituted into Mikir Hills district which was again re-Christened as Karbi Anglong in 1976 Vide Government Notification No. TAD/115/74/47 dated 14.10.1976.[7] During the British period the area inhabited by the Karbis were called 'Partially Excluded Area'. In the post-independence period, in accordance with the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hills) District Council came into existence on 23 June, 1952.[8] The powers and functions of the District Council may be broadly divided into four heads - Legislative, Executive, Financial and Judicial. The Council has a tenure of five years. There are 26 M.D.C (Member of District Council) now M.A.C (Member of Autonomous Council) constituencies in the district. The political party which secures a majority in the Council election administers the Council. The administration is headed by the C.E.M (Chief Executive Member) and is assisted by a number of his colleagues with assigned portfolios called EMs (Executive Member). An elected member to the Council without a portfolio is called the M.A.C (Member of Autonomous Council). Besides, the Council has a Chairman and a Deputy Chairman elected from the members of the elected representatives and conducts the business of the Council. The District Council budget consists of two sections - the Council Sector and the State Sector. The Council Sector is entirely dependent upon the revenues collected through the Department of Tax of the Council while the State Sector is financed jointly by the Centre and the Government of Assam. The Karbis (Mikirs) are one of the fourteen tribes of Assam to get Scheduled Tribe

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6. Girinath Das, *'Swidden Civilization' (A study among the Karbis of Assam),* Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi-110059, P-2, Year 2001.
7. Ibid, P-3
8. Ibid, P-3

status by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (Amendment) Act 1976.[9]

Physical Features of the Karbis: The Mikirs call themselves 'Arleng' A word which also means 'Man' generally, although more strickly the Mikir Man. They have also borrowed from Assamese the word 'Monit' or 'Munit' for a male human being when a precise term is required. [10] According to Charles Lyall, the Karbis (Mikirs) men resemble the Assamese of the lower castes more than most of the Tibeto-Burman races. Their colour is light yellowish brown, and the girls are often fair. The men are as tall as the majority of the hill races of Assam.[11] Colonel L.A. Waddel collected eighteen specimens and found the average height 5.583 feet, and the shortest 5.108. The average is noticeably higher than that of their neighbours, the Khasis. The average head measurements in these specimens were-length 181 millimeters; breadth, 141; Cephalic index 77.9. The nose is broad at the base and often flat, giving a nasal index 85.7.[12] The facial hair is scanty and only a thin moustache is worn. The front of the head is sometimes but not generally shorn. The hair is gathered into a knot behind, which hangs over the nape of the neck. The body is muscular, and the men are capable of prolonged exertion. In frontier expeditions in Assam they have frequently served as porters and carry heavy loads, the burden being borne upon the back and secured by a plaited bamboo or cane strap passing round the forehead, (Sinam in Karbi).[13]

Rev. P.E. Moore, one of the American Baptist missionaries writes, "These light weight are however capable of considerable endurance. I've often had them come at about 7.30 A.M. and work till Sun down with nothing to eat save 'Tamul' the bark they chew etc. They eat morning and evening only. The work was cutting jungle, bringing bamboo and building houses. In getting thatch each man cut and binds sixty large handfuls and bring them from the jungle for the day's work. Twenty of these handfuls are brought for a load and I do not consider them light for I have occasionally carried such bundles a short distance myself. Mikir

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9. Ibid, P-1
10. G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol-3 (Tibeto-Burman Family, Pt-II*), Low Price Publications, Delhi-110052, P-880, Year-1903, 1990, 1994
11. Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs,* year 1904, P- 4.
12. Ibid, P- 4
13. Ibid P- 4

women will walk eight miles and bring back sixty pounds of rice the same day"[14]

Characteristics: The Karbis have given up the use of arms when they placed themselves under the protection of the Ahom kings.[15] But in the olden days it was not so; Capital punishment awarded to criminals and wrong doers by stoning or killing with spears and other sharp objects justify their cruel nature to enemies and criminals. It was during the time of King Rengbonghom that Capital punishment was replaced by imposing fine in terms of cash. However, the leading feature of the race, in contrast with other hill tribes of Assam, is its essentially unwarlike and pacific character. Its neighbours, the Khasis, the Kacharis, the Kukis and the Nagas have for centuries engaged in continuous internecine strife, and their tribal individualities have been preserved, and differences accentuated by the state of hostility in which each unit, however small, live with all adjacent peoples. The Mikirs have always, at least during the last two centuries, as Major Stewart described them in 1855, "good subjects."[16] The Karbis are extremely homogenous. While other tribes in their neighbourhood differ in an extra ordinary manner from village to village, and constantly tend to split up into smaller aggregates, looking on all outsiders as enemies. No such dis-integrating influence has affected the Karbis whether in North Cachar, the Jaintia hills, Nowgong or the Mikir hills. Their tribal institution, their language and their national character are identical, and they pursue their peaceful husbandry in the manner as their fore fathers, raising in ordinary years sufficient food for their subsistence, and a considerable amount of cotton and lac for export to the plains. In these circumstances, surrounded by warring tribes, and still nomadic in their habits of cultivation, they have from time to time found it necessary to place themselves under the protection of stronger peoples. It has been mentioned that the traditions of the race show that they were formerly subjects to the Khasi Chief of Jaintia and the eastern states of the Khasi hills, and that they migrated thence to the territory subject to the Ahom kings.[17] During their sojourn in Khasi land, they assimilated much; dress, ornaments, personal names, methods of divination, funeral ceremonies, memorial stones all come from the Khasis, who have also contributed many words to their common speech. Many Karbis too have become Khasis. With a slight modification the Khasi surnames for example, Teron has become Tron,

14. Minutes of the Conference of the Assam Missionary of the American Baptist Missionary Union. December 14-22, 1895 (Treinnal Reports 1893-95)
15. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs*, P-5
16. Ibid, P-152.
17. Ibid P-152.

Terang, Tariang and Rongpi has become Rympais or Rymbai. P.C. Choudhury writes, "Traditions connect them with the eastern portion of the Jaintia hills bordering on the Kopili as their original seat. They have an admixture of Khasi blood.[18] Likewise, some Khasis and Jaintias may have joined the Karbi fold, but since outsiders are straight away allotted one of the Karbi surnames, through the system of 'Deng Kepon' or 'Kur Kepon', (acceptance of others into the Karbi fold) traces if any are not seen and noticed among the Karbis. Likewise, borrowing from Hinduism is equally manifest in their language, their folk tales and their religion. Assamese words are numerous in Karbi; *Arnam Kethe* seems to be a translation of Mahadeva; *'Chom-arong'* and the ideas linked there with an after-life are strongly impressed with a Hindu stamp. Charles Lyall further writes, "They claim kinship with no other tribe in Assam and are in fact, difficult to group with other branches of the great Tibeto Burman stock to which they undoubtedly belong.[19]

Mikir and Karbi, origin and their term: The Mikirs called themselves *'Arleng'*.[20] The name 'Mikir' according to Charles Lyall, is given to the race by the Assamese; its origin is unknown. They call themselves *'Arleng'* which mean 'man' in general, It has been asserted that *Arleng* means properly only a Mikir man, not a man in general, who would be called *'monit'* or *'munit'*.[21] The other meaning for *'Arleng'* is 'Hill Slope; Probably, they call themselves by this name to declare as 'Hill dwellers'. Now, they prefer to call themselves Karbi' and even their; homeland is called Karbi Anglong meaning 'hills of the Karbis' or 'Karbi hills'.

Samuel E. Peal observes, "Names that we first spelt correctly have been thoughtlessly altered, and unless taken in hand at own will became unmeaning, and at times misleading fixtures. The word 'Asam' derived from the word 'Ahom' and which later is spelt 'Asam' by the Assamese themselves is a case in point. Formerly, in all private and public correspondence and published works there was one 'S' only; but in an evil hour the spirit of innovation moved someone to alter the correct mode and gave us the unmeaning 'SS'[22] This unmeaning phenomenon has continued in the naming of the various tribes of erstwhile Assam. The term

18. P.C Choudhury, *The History of civilization of the people of Assam to the 12th Century A.D*. Spectrum Publication, Pan Bazar, Guwahati-781001, P-86, Year-1987 (Revised 3rd Edition)

19. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs,* P-5

20. Opcit, P.C. Choudhury, *The History of civilization of the people of Assam to the 12th Century A.D*. P-86

21. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs*, P-4

22. Samuel E. Peal, *Note on the Origin and Orthography of River names in India*, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography Series, Vol-11, No-2, PP 90-95, Year-1889.

'Naga' was coined in similar 'evil hour' that meant nothing to the Nagas themselves. Such gross mistakes had been committed in relation to the Karbi when the tribe was named 'Mikir' that not only meant nothing to the tribe but was also derogatory at best. Assamese historian like Gunabhiram Baruah chose to create a 'Mikir' out of the Sanskritic 'Markat' meaning 'eater of raw flesh; just as the Naga tribes were almost identified to be the snake worshipping Nagas of upper India where there was neither cultural nor historical relations or similarities.[23]

A writer from the tribe wrote that the name 'Mikir' was given by the British.[24] However the unknown origin of the word, according to Lyall should not be a recent development of the early nineteenth century.

Some hypothesis regarding the origin of the word 'Mikir' is presented which of course are vague, incoherent and highly illogical on the one hand, and on the other they also tinged with racial slurs. (1) 'Thireng Vangreng' a Karbi King had a daughter named 'Mekri'. She was married to a Naga Prince. The Nagas, being not able to pronounce 'Mekri' properly could pronounce it as 'Mekeri' only.[25]

'Thireng Vangreng' literally 'dead-alive come alive, occupies a very important place in Karbi customs. Whether Thireng Vangreng is a historical person or simply a myth is quite a separate matter but he is credited with divine access to both the worlds of the living and the dead with equal ease. He is credited to have introduced the elaborate funeral rituals among the Karbis as he knows both the worlds. In Karbi folklore, there is no mention that Thireng Vangreng ever had any children in this world. Existing folklore mentions about Thireng's wife living in the other world that explains his frequent visit to and fro. The theory of Thireng's daughter by the name 'Mekri' marrying a Naga Prince is highly ridiculous though inter-marriages among various tribes are a possibility. Furthermore, Thireng Vangreng is neither described as a King nor is there any mention of his worldly death in the Karbi Oral tradition. (2) When the Karbis first entered into Assam, they had a cat with them.

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23. Alwin Teron and Dharam Teron. Edited, *Karbi studies*, Angik Prakashan, Pan Bazar, Guwahati, P-66, Year-2008

24. Mondolsing Bey, *The socio-Economic life of the Karbis at a glance*, Karbi Lammet Amei, (Karbi Sahitya Sabha, Diphu, P-1, Year-2004

25. B.N. Bordoloi*, Karbis-their origin and migration*: Bulletin of the Tribal Research Institute, Vol-1 No. 111, 1985, for welfare of plain tribes and Backward classes Govt. of Assam.

Unfortunately, the cat was lost. Another group of people happened to meet them and when asked about their identity the question being unintelligible, the Karbis replied that they were searching for the lost cat, that is '*Meng kiri'* (*Meng*-cat, *kiri*-search). The people misunderstood the meaning of the term *'Meng kiri'* and thought that the newcomers introduced themselves as 'Meng kiri'. This in course of time became 'Mikir'.[26]

This has been the most enduring hypothesis about the origin of the word 'Mikir'. But strangely enough, there is no mention or reference to any such term in any of the surviving oral traditions of the tribe. The invention of a lost cat seeking tribe must have been quite an endeavour but this sort of unmeaning had only created more social and political distortions in the later years that did more harm to the tribe than good.

(3) The Ahom Buranji written by Gunabiram Baruah describe the Mikirs as follows, *"Mikir Jati bortoman Nagaon, Naga hills Jilar aru Khasiya porbot jilar majhor parboitya thait ei hanto prokriter Jati bah kore. Homobhumitu onek mikir ase. Ihote amar manu hoite borkoi milibo pare. Mikir bilakok amar manuhe 'dalor mikir' bule. Hehoteo sneh ba onugrohor ahate heirup baikyo nije bule. Iyar dwara ene upolobdhi hobo pare je 'hakhamrig' ba 'markot' hobdorei Mikir hobdo opobhrongo matro. Ei jati adibahi luk, ihote kosari rojar odhin asil".*[27]

(The Mikir, those peace loving people, live in the hilly regions between the Nagaon, Naga Hills and Khasi hills district. Many Mikirs live in the plains too. These people can mix with our people very much. Mikirs are called, 'Mikirs living in the tree branches' by our people. They in the hope of getting love and affection call themselves so. It may thus give such an understanding that Mikir is only a derivative from 'Sakhamriga' or 'Markat'. These people are aboriginals they were under the Kachari kings).

A traditional Karbi village or *'Rong'* is organized around the institution of the village Headman who is known as *'Sarthe'* among the hill Karbis and *'Bangthe'* or *'Rongthe'* among the plains dwelling Karbis. The members of every house hold of the village are called *'Mekar'*. It could therefore be possible that a Karbi introduced himself to an outsider only as a *'Mekar'* or ordinary member of a Karbi village. In a sense every Karbi is a *'Mekar'* and in

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26. Opcit, Dharamsing Teron and Elwin Teron (Edited), *Karbi Studies,* P-20

27. Gunabiram Baruah, *Ahom Buranji,* Assam Publication Board, Guwahati-7, P-13, Year-2003 (3rd Edition)

those days of communication barrier created by unintelligible linguistic differences, the outsider simply took the tribe to be only a *'Mekar'* which in course of time got corrupted to give the word 'Mikir'. Therefore, the 'Mikir' derivative tracing its root to 'Mekar' is more plausible than those outlandish hypotheses that would make us believe. The rulers simply imposed the term 'Mikir' on the Karbis by inventing explanations which suited them. The plains dwelling Karbis had suffered such, impositions since as a 'Ronghang' was corrupted to Rahang, a 'Rongchehon' became Ronghon or Rongson and 'Killing' became Klien etc. It is a pity that the rulers tongue has continued to refuse to make a difference between a 'Teron' and 'Terang' to create quite another non-existent Karbi clan as 'Terong'[28]

It is thus evidently clear that the tribe's name 'Mikir' was given by outsiders but they prefer to call among themselves *'Arleng'* and to outsiders as 'Karbi'. The Karbis had to agitate for the change of the tribes name to 'Karbi' inorder to put the word in its rightful place. The students community and the educated group joined hands supported by all classes of people from the tribe led the Government of Assam to re-Christen the 'Mikir hills' district to Karbi Anglong district and 'Mikir' to Karbi by a notification on 14 October, 1976. (Govt. Notification number TAD/4/115/74).

The word 'Karbi' is derived from two sources namely, *'Thekar Kebi'* and *'Me akar kebi'*. Thekar kebi is a purification ritual performed after six months of the birth of a baby.[29] It is said that Borli-e's Daughter-in-law was going through labour pain ready for delivery of a child. Seeing the unbearable pain and suffering of his Daughter in-law, Borli-e invokes a demon Pangjok to assist the process of delivery which the demon agreed. But at the time of feast, food could not be offered to Pangjok the demon as she becomes, invisible from public eye. Hemphu, the main household God who attended the feast saw Pangjok through his power and offered a portion of food from his share. Others followed what Hemphu did. The people thus introduced themselves as '*thekar kebi Aso'* from which the word 'Karbi' came into being.[30] The practice of offering a portion of food before eating still continues even to this day among the Karbis.

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28. Opcit, Dharamsing Teron and Elwin Teron, *Karbi Studies*, ed. P-70

29. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *The Socio-Economic Life of the Karbis at a Glance*, P-1

30. Opcit, Dharamsing Teron and Elwin Teron, *Karbi Studies*, P -21

'Me Akar kebi' means keeping the flame of fire in the fire place.[31] The Karbis in all seasons of the year keep or lit the fire burning specially in the verandah of the house called, *'Hong'*. It is here that the owner of the house relaxes and entertains the guest and visitors. Some houses have the record of keeping the fire burning for many years by never allowing the fire to extinguish. A slight variation of the story is again found. A Karbi had left his home after lighting a fire in the hearth inside the house. In Karbi *'Me Akar'* means 'a flame' and *'Bi'* means 'to keep' or 'to leave'. His wife, who was out of the house saw the fire from the distance and asked her husband why he left the fire burning which might result in burning the whole homestead. In Karbi, *'Me akar chonghoi bi Kangkok ?'* (Why did you leave the fire burning?) The descendants of the person concerned were known as 'Me akar kebi' literally 'Flame keepers' and in course of time it came to be known as 'Karbi'.

In continuing the debate of the word 'Mikir' Tanmay Bhattacharjee gave an interesting account. He writes, "The enchanting hills south of their territories attracted them (Dimasas) without being thoroughly detailed they gave this chain of hills a name 'The lemon country'. The Dimasa preference for coining words by the associated meaning is well known. *'Sa'* means 'Son'. Similarly 'Mikir' means sour originally but it denoted lemon. The inhabitants of that sour or lemon country were called *'Mikhrisa'*. The whole of present Meghalaya and the leeside of the Meghalaya plateau have the climate and soil which allow the cultivation of lemon. The word *'Mikhrisa'* suffered natural speech corruption and ultimately became Mikir.[32]

Origin and migration : The Karbis maintain a rich source of folk lores and folk songs where every important event be it social, religion and others are narrated in the form of songs which were handed down from generation to generation orally. The origin and migration of the tribe is found in the song *'Mosera'* or *'Kimora'*. Literally, it means, 'recalling the past.' The full version of the narrative is now rarely sung. The existing versions vary from region to region but they retain the same theme and the peculiar narrative style which distinguishes the *'Moresa'* from a host of other Karbi ballads. The theme is almost uniform everywhere but however, the omission or inclusion of some particular term or terms at the whims of singer to singer may not be ruled out, and the term thus omitted or included have posed the danger of

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31. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *The Socio-Economic Life of the Karbis at a Glance*, P-2.

32. Opcit, Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *The Sociology of the Karbis*, P-15

altering the present understanding or interpretation of the narrative. The exponents of *'Mosera'* sing the lengthy narrative in a breathless fashion. In fact, an exponent takes pride in rendering the stanzas of the lengthy narrative in one breath. The narrative is sung by the Head of village youths, the *'Klengsarpo'* or his deputy the *'Klengdun'* during the special ritual of *'Riso Chojun'* The festival is observed to mark the end of the compulsory tradition of 'Youth co-operative known as *'Jir kedam'*. Unmarried members of the primitive Karbi tradition of 'Youth Dormitory' known as *'Terang'*, participate in the *'Jir kedam'*, whiche therefore serves the purpose of practical training to adulthood. Another important occasion when the *'Mosera'* is sung is during the funerary ritual called, *'Thi Karhi'*. It is sung in a question and answer fashion between the heads of village youths. Here, they vie among each other in how much they can prolong the breathlessness.

According to the *'Mosera'* version the Karbis originated from the eggs of a mythical bird *'Voplakpi'*. The narrative started with the difficult circumstances under which the Karbis were born out of the eggs of the mythical bird, which is not identifiable with any surviving avian species. The subsequent passages of the lengthy narrative tell tales of the trials and tribulations of the tribe in its migration from the *'Longle Achete'*, the 'Navel of the Earth.' The following passage of 'Mosera' taken from the Chinthong version in west Karbi Anglong narrates the Karbis birth from the mythical bird. "*Om..... dei.....'' Teji le Akengri lepu*. (A kind of tree too by the feet of so said). *Long chong le a kengri lepu* (doublet) *Karbi le chetebin lepu*, (Karbi too sheltered so said), *Karbak le chetebin lepu* (Doublet) *Nangphi ji ji nangphi hai he lepu* (Born nearly, born dare not, so said) (Doublet) *Nang plang ji ji nang plang hai he lepu.* (Doublet) *Bang asim tangte lepu.* (Other race then so said). *La bang Ahom tangte lepu*. (This other Ahom race then so said). *La bang chomang tangte lepu*. (This other Khasi race then so said), *La bang naka tangte lepu*. (This other Naga race then so said). *La bang Nara tangte lepu* (Doublet) *Bang ke plak vut ati lepu* (Others then a kind of bird small egg then so said). *La bang plakvuk so ati lepu*. (These other races a kind of bird small egg so said). *Ati le pum pum suri lepu.* (Eggs also numbered thousands so said). *Ati le pum pharo lepu*. (Eggs also numbered hundred so said). *Epum longchong pati lepu.* (One egg on erect stone laid so said). *Epum kong long voi voi phiphlot keche mandet lepu.* (One egg rolled and hatched became non Karbi race so said). *Epum Konglong voi voi phiphlot naka nara mandet lepu* (One egg rolled and hatched naga race so said.)

La chenam lale

(This true thus)

La pani ningke

(this day until).....[33]

The Karbis and the tribes mentioned in the *'Mosera'* are therefore born of the eggs of a mythical bird mentioned as *'Voplakpi'*. One who may not be bothered with either the *'Mosera'* or the 'egg origin' of the tribe should also realise the fact that the Karbis are not alone who are born of the eggs of a mythical bird. The idea that the cosmos was born from several eggs laid by a bird is found in the oldest Balto-Finnic myth. Different versions of the Balto-Finnic Creation Song were known among the Estonians, the Finns of Ingria, the Votes and the Karelians. According to the Estonians, 'Swallow' the Sun bird, built a nest in the field, laid three eggs in it. One became 'Dawn' to the nether world, the second became 'Sun' to the upper world and the third became the 'sky'. In his paper 'Ex Ovo Omnia', Ulo Volk further observes that the Balto- Finnic cosmogenic myth has many international parallels. They are so numerous that it may initially seem that myths about cosmic eggs belong to the common traditions of mankind. An egg is a symbol of latent life force, fertility and resurrection in many cultures and the words denoting an 'egg' often has sexual connotations. Muna (egg) is parallel to the meaning 'testicle' in the Proto - Uralic language. The Vedic and Sanskrit word 'Anda' is also ambiguous denoting egg, testicle and sperm. In the dream omens of Estonian folklore the egg is also connected with fertility. In the whole world there are rather four areas where myths about cosmic eggs belong to indigenous oral traditions 1) The Baltic Finnic region; 2) The eastern Mediterranean area; 3) South-Asia (China, Tibet Indo-China, India); 4) The Malay Archipelago, Oceania and Australia.[34] The egg cosmogony is also found among the Egyptians as Volk describes in his paper. The Sun God 'Ra' was born of the primeval egg. A few traces of the myth of the cosmic egg can be found in the Phoenician traditions described by the Jewish Philosopher and some Greek authors.

In Karbi folklore, the mythical bird *'Voplakpi'* laid several eggs out of which were born the progenitors of different peoples and tribes of Assam. In Dimasa myths; spirits and ghosts are born out of the seven primordial eggs. To add to the list of beliefs in the 'egg cosmogony' is the Manipuri (Meitei) myth where the story of egg origin is described.[35]

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33. Opcit, Dharamsing Teron and Elwin Teron, *Karbi Studies* (Ed) PP, 9-10

34. Ibid, P-13

35. J. Shakespear, *Religion of Manipur, Vol-24*, United Publisher, Pan Bazar, Guwahati, PP-409-455 Year-1913.

Assam could become a museum of races because it is situated in one of the migrating routes of mankind.[36] The various elements passing through Assam from mainland India on the one side and South-East Asia on the other left their traces on both the hills and the plains. The possible routes of migration were three or four. First, through the north or the mountain passes of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan; Second, through the Valley of the Ganges and the Bramhaputra from the west; Third, by sea or the Bay of Bengal passing through Bengal and Burma; Fourth, the Assam - Burma route While the second and the third routes are used by the Aryans and other elements coming from the mainland India, the first and the fourth routes are used by all the Mongolian groups who came to Assam and North-East India, and made this land their future homes.

According to P.C. Choudhury, it is doubtful whether the northern route that passes through Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan helped much in the migration of racial elements. But the existence of this route was mentioned by the Greek Classical sources particularly 'Periplus of the Erythrean sea' and Ptolemy's 'Geography'.[37] The route through the mountain passes of Tibet and Bhutan is mentioned in other later sources. It may be suggested that some racial elements such as the Caucasoid Alpine and the Indo-Chinese made their way in small numbers into Assam through the passes in the north and some of them had settled in the region now called Arunachal Pradesh.

The migration pattern of the Karbis is that they came to Assam wave by wave consisting of small groups. Therefore, one of the groups might have taken the Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan route and reached Assam. The story of an orphan as found in Charles Lyall's Book, 'The Mikirs' resembles the incidents of a folk tale of Tibeto Burman dialects of Rangkas, Darmas, Chaudangs and Byangs (Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.-III Part-I). These dialects are spoken in the northern portion of Kumaon on the borders of Tibet. Because of the distance between these communities and the Karbis the coincidence according to Lyall is interesting. But the Karbis may have collected the story while taking the mountainous route which passes through these areas. 'Kathmandu' the Capital of Nepal too is akin to the Karbi vocabulary. A further research may reveal interesting information about the route and the

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36. Opcit, 'P.C Choudhury, *The History and Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12th Century*, P-75

37. Ibid, P-75

people migrating through it. Some writers pointed the possibility of people migrating through this route in the pre-historic times.[38]

But the most common migration route of all the Tibeto-Burman stock of the great Mongolian race was the Assam-Burma route. The earliest reference to the Assam Burma route is found in the account of Chang Kien on the basis of which Pelliot has shown that from 200 B.C, there was a regular route by land to China, through Assam, upper Burma and Yunan.[39] P.C Bagchi pointed out that the routes from Pataliputra (Patna) through Assam-Burma to China were three; first, through the Patkai to Upper Burma, second; through Manipur upto the Chindwin; and third, through Arakan upto Irrawady, all leading to Kunming in China.[40] The Kia-Tan of the 8th Century A.D gave detailed accounts of the Assam- Burma routes. Like other Tibeto-Burman groups who landed in Assam and the North - East, the Karbis too used these routes in order to come to Assam.

In course of their migration from *'Longle Achete'* (Navel or centre of the Earth) the Karbis settled mainly at two junctions, one is the Tibet, China, Mongolia junction and the other is the Burma, Thailand junction. These two junctions are confirmed and corroborated by their folk songs and tales particularly the *'Mosera'* song. Davidson Ingti wrote that the Karbis left *'Longte Achete'* and migrated to eastern side of China land i.e., Mongolia. In Karbi it is called *'Mongli Monglai'*.[41] Prof Janus A matisoff, the reputed Linguist who had extensively investigated the Sino-Tibetan and the Tibeto - Burman language family comments, "The proto-Sino-Tibetan (PST) homeland seems to have been somewhere on the Himalayan plateau, where the great river of East and South-East Asia including the Yellow river, Yangtze, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Salween, and Irrawady have their sources. The time of hypothetical Proto Sino - Tibetan unity, when the Proto-Han (Proto Chinese) and Proto Tibeto-Burman (PTB) peoples formed a relatively undifferentiated linguistic community, must have been at least as remote as the Proto-Indo-European period perhaps around 400 BC''[42]

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38. Ibid, P-98.
39. Ibid, P-76.
40. Ibid, P-76.
41. Davidson Ingti, *Christinity among the Karbis and its Impacts*, Author, Union Church Road, Diphu, P-3, Year-1998
42. Dharamsing Teron (E.d), Karbi Studies Vol.- 1, Assam Book Hive, Pan Bazar Guwahati-1, P- 201 Year 2012.

The job of identifying the Karbi migration route resembles seeking a tiny pin from a huge haystack. The Karbi tradition of maintaining genealogy that continues to modern day through the ritual practice of *'Chamburuk-So Hor Kepi'* (Offering of wine to ancestors) could recall the ancestors name to only four to five generations. All the dead ancestors' names are not retained. In any case, for any Karbi who is genuinely interested in exploring the migration route that his long forgotten and nameless ancestors might have taken to reach the present habitat thousands of years hence, studies into the existing versions of the folk narratives of '*Moresa'* and *'Kacharhe'* are unavoidable.

The existing *'Mosera'* traditions in various regions in Karbi Anglong display basically a uniform theme of the origin of the tribe and the peculiar narrative style. But the *Chinthong*[43] Version seems to have retained more detailed and interesting explanations of the ordeal of the tribe's migration from the Earth's Navel or *'Longle Achete'* through diverse lands and endless persecutions to its present habitat. *'Longle Achete'* is where the Karbis first attempted to install their first King 'Sot Recho' or the 'Truthful King'. The *'Mosera'* further describes that *'Longle Achete'* is surrounded by the off springs or followers of 'Ji' and 'Hova' which seems to be a direct reference to 'Jehova' the God of the Jews. *'Mosera'* also describes that the Karbis request for passage through the settlement surrounded by the 'Ji' and 'Hova' followers is granted and allowed to proceed to the *'Longle Achete'* to finally install their King.[44] The following verses from the Chinthong version of the *'Mosera'* narrate the Karbi exodus through the 'Navel of the Earth'. "*Ansi Sum aso tangte lepu, Sang aso tangte lepu*. (And then the children of *Sum* and *Sang*).[45] *Lita recho chome lepu, kethe chome lepu*. (We also can have our king, our great leader) *Lasi recho chebat lonang lepu, kethe chebat lonang lepu*. (Therefore lets ordain a king, a leader) *Recho atheng rinang lepu, kethe atheng rinang lepu*. (Let's look for one befitting a King) *Recho atheng nangri lepu, kethe atheng nangri lepu*. (Search for one befitting a King ensued) *Timung asor tangte lepu, Rongphar asor tangte lepu.* (There's one among the Timung and Rongphar clan) *Pap Klemkle dolang lepu, pun klemkle dolang lepu*. (Sins and wrong doings have he not committed) *Ri asek kechok lepu, keng asek kechok lepu* (strong and correct arms and legs he possessed) *Laphan le recho batnang lepu,*

43. One of the four distinct cultural divisions of the tribe; viz Rongkhang, Chinthong Amri and Lum Bajong.

44. Opcit, Dharamsing Teron and Elwin Teron, *Karbi Studies* P-26.

45. Sum and Sang are the first Karbi parents according to the folk narrative of 'Karbi Keplang the legend of creation and origin'.

kethe batnang lepu (Him we ordain king, him we ordain our leader) Lasi asot kedo apot lepu, abot kedo apot lepu, (Because holy is he, and pure he is) Lasi Sot recho pukok lepu, bot recho pukok lepu. (Therefore the holy one, pure one he is called) Lasi Sum aso chingvai lepu, Sang aso chingvai lepu. (Therefore Sum's children and Sang's children consulted) Recho kebi adim tangte lepu, kethe kebi adim tangte lepu. (King's abode, leaders abode should be) Inglong Kangthir adim nangji lepu arlok Kangthir tangte lepu. (Therefore mount of holiness, canyon of holiness is where.....) Pirthe la achetedet lo lepu, Mindar la achedet lepu. (Earth navel, universe navel is.....) Lasi pirthe a achete adim, mindar la achete adim. (Then Earth's this navel, this universe navel). Ahem Kimpidam lonang lepu, arit Kim pidam lonang lepu. (Home thus begins to be built, hearth thus begins to be built) Ansi Karbi aso atum, Karbak aso atum Ahem kimpi dampo kepu, arit kimpi dampo kepu. (Home they commit to build hearth they commit to build) Lasi loti jokje lepu, tovar jokje lepu, (Then passage not being free access not being free). Lasi sudu jokje lepu, same jokje lepu, (Then passage not being free, route not being free) Bang inglong komchen tangte lepu, bang arlok kom chen tangte lepu. (They surrounded mountain, they surrounded canyon) *Ji atum dothip lepu, Hova atum dothip lepu*. (Ji in their strength resided, Hova in their strength resided).

The 'Mosera' also speaks of the tribe's flight to the land of the 'White Sky' and 'White Earth' 'White Mountain and white canyon'in the company of great many communities of the Kuki Chinpi, the Dukpa, the Lepcha the Lama and the Tamang. The following verses give an idea of the Karbi migration. *Bang Kuki Chinpi atum tangte, Kuki Chinpo atum tangte*. (They the great Kuki Chins) *Do adim cherai lepu, thak adim cherai lepu* (Demarcated the areas to dwell) *Dak nedung tangte lepu, Dak ne rai tangte lepu* (Here surrounding us) *Nangtum Dukpa atum tangte lepu, Nangtum Lepcha atum tangte lepu* (You Dukpas and Lepchas) *Nangtum Lama atum tangte lepu, nangtum Tamang atum tangte lepu*. (You Lamas and Tamangs) D*o adim nangjang ponpe lepu, thak adim nangjang ponpe lepu.* (Cannot be accomodated we are told) *Lasi bang Kukipi atum pudet lasi bang Hukipo atum pudet.* (Then the great Kukis spoke to us). *Bang dakpen thurnon kepu, bang dakpen damnon Kepu.* (They ordered us to leave from their land) *Lasi bang Lama atum penta, Lepcha atum penta*. (Therefore with the Lamas and the Lepchas) *Bang Kuki Chinpi atum Kuki Chinpo atum*. (They the great Kuki-chins) *Ron chepho lepu, mai chepho lepu* (Battles among them ensued) *Si Karbi atum tangte, Si Karbak atum tangte.* (So the Karbis and all of them) *Ron kapheredum lepu mai kapheredun lepu,* (Being afraid of the battles) *Lasi chingvai lepu, Lasi chingsai lepu.* (Then the Karbis consulted among themselves) *Dak bang ron dokok lepu, dak bang mai dokok lepu*. (Here a battle is being fought) *Jo arni chethu lepu, jo arni chethat lepu* (Every night

killing took place, everyday killing took place) *Lasi sining kelok lepu lasi longle kelok lepu*. (So in sky white, so in earth white) *Inglong kelok tangte lepu, arlok kelok tangte lepu.* (Mountain white and canyon white) *Dodun adim ave lepu, thakdun adim ave lepu.* (Accomodation not available) *Lasi dakpen be lonang lepu, lasi dakpen che lonang lepu* (So from here we flee, so from here we disperse) *Lasi Karbi atum tangte lepu, lasi Karbak atum tangte lepu* (So we the Karbis) *Lasi nangbe thulo lepu, lasi nang che thulo lepu*. (Therefore we dispersed again) *Sining ta kanphuri vanglo lepu, longle ta kan phuri vanglo lepu* (Sky we roamed around, Earth we roamed around)

The ordeal continues for the Karbis as they are driven out from the land of the White Mountains avoiding the battles that killed everyday and night. The White Mountains seems an unmistakable reference to the great Himalayas while the Kuki Chins, the Dukpas the Lepchas, the Lamas and the Tamangs are easy to identity. In any case the beautiful story of the 'discovery of rice' by the Karbis while in close proximity to the Kuki Chins is still prevalent. It is said that the Kuki Chins too have such similar story.

The next step in the Karbi exodus is rarrated in the following verses of the 'Mosera' "*Bang Karbi aso tangte, bang Karbak aso tangte lepu"*. (They the Karbi off springs) *Muring bang rong nangkim lepu, Murong bang rong nangkim lepu*, (Muring and Murong are where they built villages) *Muring kedo thirthe lepu, Murong kedo thirthe lepu.* (Settlements at Muring and Murong did not last) *Taipi pen ron chepi lepu, Taipo pen ron chepi lepu.* (Battles with the great Tais ensued) *Ansi Muring pen nangbethu lepu, Murong pen nang bethu lepu*. (Then from Muring and Murong the Karbis dispersed) *Sining ta Kanphuri lepu, longle ta kan phuri lepu* (Sky and Earth we roamed) *Ningkan kre hini aphi lepu, ningkan kre kethom aphi lepu* (After twelve-thirteen long years of wanderings) *Manghu pen vangseta lepu, Mangran pen vang seta lepu*. (Through blunder, and slips-ups we advanced) *Arakan nangpho lepu, Paikan nang pho lepu.* (To the Arakan and Patkai ranges) I*nglongpi la akengri lepu, arlokpo la akengri lepu.* (By the shadows of the great mountains and canyons) *Lasi rong nangkim lepu, lasi rup nangkim lepu*. (Then villages were built again) *Lasi Arakan kedo jokta, Paikan kedo jokta* (Then settlements in Arakan and Patkai too) *Havar cho chithi dokok, hapat cho chithi dokok*. (Land disputes arose) *Lasi jaipek alam chepho lepu, jaihoi alam chepho lepu.* (Then confrontation arose on the question of boundaries) *Lasi Barmipi pudet lepu, Barmipo pudet lepu*.(Then the great Burmese ordered). *Thoipi longle kejoi dolang, joipi longle kejoi dolang.* (In the great plains there are vacant places) *Kopli la a pirthe lepu, Kolong la a pirthe lepu*. (It is where rivers Kopli and Kolong flowed) *Longle kejoi dolang lepu, phelang kejoi*

dolang lepu.(Vacant lands existed there) *Lale nang Karbi aso tangte lepu, nang Karbak aso tangte lepu,* (Then you Karbis with your offsprings) *Naka la dong pon plut damnon, nara la dong pon plut damnon.* (You proceed through the nagas) *Anke nangtum thoipi phopo lepu anke nangtum joipi phopo lepu* (Then you will reach the great expanse of the plains).

The Karbis encounter with the great Tais at '*Muring Murong'* is narrated here. The Karbis are displaced from Muring Murong after their defeat at the hands of the great Tais. The Karbis *'Muring Murong*' seems to be the Tai version, *'Mungri Mungram'*.[46] After leaving *'Muring-Murong'* the Karbis moved further for Arakan mountains range of Burma. The Karbis thereafter confronted with the Burmese who forced them to leave their land towards the great river valleys of the Kopili and the Kolong in the present day Assam through the land of the Nagas. The Karbis settlement in Dimapur area before the Dimasa assault between 1150-1536 A.D has been described in a historical account.[47] The account mentioned about the settlement of various Karbi clans in the area which were given as 'Thisa, Thiren, Thirum, Gungjao, Gunglem, Jiliasa etc original Karbi clans of Tisso, Terang, Teron, Ingjai, Ingleng etc. But before their sojourn, to the present habitat, they make the last few stop overs in Burma as the following verses reveal.

"*Lasi Salu nangpho lepu*. (Then Salu we reached) *Lasi Mukindon nangpho lepu* (Then Mukindon we reached) *Lale arlok kangtui lepu* (So deep the canyon) *Same anle jokje lepu* (Road was not safe) *Sadu anle jokje lepu* (Neither was any path available) *Lasi inglong karlu tangte lepu* (Then climbing high mountain) *Lasi arlok karlu tangte lepu* (Then climbing so deep gorges) *Lasi ingchin adon chedon lepu* (That's why iron bridge was built) *Lasi arlong adon chedon lepu* (That's why stone bridge was built) *Lasi inglong bat lo lepu* (Then mountain was scaled) *Lasi arlok bat lo lepu* (Then deep canyon was crossed.

The reference to 'Salu' and 'Mukindon' as mountains is thought provoking. Here, one is tempted to imagine 'Salu' not as a mountain but as the shortened form of Salween, the majestic river of Burma. Nevertheless, and despite this uncertainty about chronology and geography, there is a broad consensus that the homeland of Tibeto-Burman is somewhere in

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46. Edward Gait, *History of Assam*, Lawyers Book Stall, Pan Bazar, Guwahati-8, PP, 73-74, Year-1926. (Mungri-Mungram means country deserted Country uninhabited)

47. Upendra Chandra Guha, *Kachharer Itibritta*, Parul Prakashani, Agartala, Tripura, P-46, Year 2006

that famous region where northern Burma meets South-West China and four major rivers, Yangtze, Mekong, Salween, Irrawady run side by side from North to South. *'Salu'* is also a kind of thorny creeper in present day Karbi Vocabulary, which could have been implanted from the difficult wanderings across dreary rain forest in Burma. *'Mukindon'* though at present stated to be a Khasi derivative (*Mou*-Stone, *kindon* 'steps of stone'), Burma map shows the presence of 'Mindon' mountain that the Karbi ancestors might have once encountered.

The Karbi migrants in their wanderings across N.C. hills have many present day references. A reference to *'Vo Amir'* literally meaning 'flower of birth' (the flowery crest a top a bird's head) is also found in the Karbi elegaic *'Kecharhe'* and the present memory of the location points to the hill ranges surrounding Jatinga and Haflong in N.C. Hills. Charles Lyall mentions that, they (the Mikirs) are also found in considerable numbers on the northern skirts of the Assam range in Nowgong, the Khasi and Jaintia hills and Kamrup, and were once numerous, as testified by the local place and river names in North Cachar.[48] Lyall also mentions that, they (Mikirs) had fights with the Dimasas or Hill Kacharis and were led by Thong Nokbe and other captains, who established a fort at Diyang-Mukh, the junction of the Diyang and Kopili rivers, the ruins of which are still to be seen.[49] From the North Cachar Hills the bulk of the population moved west ward. The traditions of the race points to the eastern portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills bordering on the Kapili river where many still remain as their original abobe.[50] Being harassed by warfare between Khasi or Synteng chiefs they resolved to move into Ahom territory and sent emissaries to claim protection from the Ahom Governor of Raha. These unfortunate persons being unable to make themselves understood, were straight away buried alive in the embankment of a tank which the Governor was excavating. [51] The hostilities which ensued were concluded by an embassage to the King himself in Sibsagar, and the Mikirs have ever since been living peacefully in the territory assigned to them.

The Rongkhang version of the *'Mosera'* mentions the wanderings across the Khasi

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48. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs*, P-2

49. Ibid P-5

50. Ibid P-4.

51. Ibid, P-5

Jainlia land. *"Chomangpi along, Chomangpo along*" (In the land of the Khasi and Jaintias) "*Li nangbe loke, Li nang ehe loke"* (We migrated) *"Tamu nangdo loke, Namdong nangdo loke"* (Tamu and Namdong are where we landed).

The place Tamu Namdong as referred to in the *'Mosera'* are located in the present day Meghalaya in Jainlia Hill district. In Namdong the remnants of old Karbi habitation, *Langtuk - Longchong - Long-e, tharve - Jangphong* (Earthen well, memorial stone, mango and jackfruit trees) are still found. The 'Lang tuk' earthen well was used during the funeral ceremony by the Karbis. This earthen well is referred to as *'Chhat Mynri'* or *'That Mynri'* meaning'old wise man'by the Jaintias. Interestingly, Tamu has no related meaning either in Karbi or Khasi languages. Tamu and Namthong are small towns inside present day Burma .[52] The Khasis refer to the new Karbi migrants as *'Nongpoi Tamu'*. Some migrants Karbi from Tamu who assimilated to Khasi still bear the title, *'Jait Tamu'* or 'belonging to Tamu or 'Tamu tribesmen'

Regarding the Karbi migration and settlement in the plains of present day Kamrup and Morigaon districts, P.C. Phangcho writes, "It is not exactly known from where the Dumralis (plain Karbis) began to settle in the plains. According to a tradition prevalent in Panbari, Chenimur, Sonapur and Jagiroad, a group of Karbis came down from the neighbouring hills on the south and established a kingdom under a King named Dumuru. Henceforth, these people came to be known as *'Dumrali'* or *'Thoi Aso'* meaning plain dwellers."[53] Charles lyall wrote, "The Mikirs who settled in the plains of Nowgong and took to plough are called *'Dumrali'* by the Mikirs and *'Tholua'* by the Assamese. They are said to have acted as interpreters to the mission which visited the Ahom King at Sibsagar.[54] Myths, legends or hearsays are the stuff that oral traditions are made of from where history emerges. The *'Mosera'* tradition of the Karbis may thus be atleast studied as to know their origin and migration from the beginning till the present day. The memories of the past through songs like the *'Mosera'* could thus serve the purpose of meaningful starting point.[55]

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52. Opcit, Dharamsing Teron and Elwin Teron, *Karbi Studies*, P-34.

53. P.C. Phangcho, *"The Karbis: A Spatio-Temporal analysis in tribal geography*. Approved Ph.D thesis, Gauhati University, Year-1990.

54. Opcit Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs,* P-16-17

55. *'Kimora'* is taken from the Karbi folk music project of Thomas Kaiser and D.S Teron.

'Longle Achete,' the navel of the Earth in the Kimora: The Karbi exodus as narrated in the '*Kimora'* provokes some interesting questions. The Karbis are described to have begun their first exodus from *'Longle Achete'* the navel of the Earth fleeing from the pursuit of more powerful adversary referred to as 'Tongklong Meji'. Likewise, the next door neighbour of the Karbis, the Khasis believe their origin from the 'Navel of the sky,' '*Sohpet Bneng',* The Khasi ancestors are believed to have descended by a golden ladder from heaven at *'Sohpet Bneng'* situated on a hilltop by the river Barapani. The reference to 'Navel of earth' in the *Mosera*[56] provokes one to draw some paralled to the powerfully asserted Christian and Judaic concept of Jerusalem as the Navel of the Earth.[57] Jewish- Greek literatures also claim the centrality of Jerusalem. The concept of 'Navel of Earth' is however not confined to the Jewish traditions alone. The Buddhists also regard Bodhgaya as the 'Navel of the Earth' centre to the Buddhist faith. The next reference in the Mosera is of Jehova the Jewish God and the Israelis. Indeed, it is perplexing. Did the Karbis once stayed in close proximity to the Jews of modern Israel in a land that flows with milk and honey? [58] The answer is hard but the very many similarities of the tribe in their socio-religious practice with the Israelis, suggest their settlement near them in the land of Palestine. For if two communities stay side by side for many years, interchange of cultural traditions takes place.

The clan structure of the Karbis: The Karbis have five main clans called 'Kur'.[59] These are Terang, Teron, Inghee, Ingti and Timung. These five clans are also called by other names namely, Hanjang, Kronjang, Ejang, Lijang and Tungjang. Each of the five clans has a number of sub-clans called 'Kurjon'. While Inghee and Timung have thirty sub-clans each, Terang has fifteen, Teron has nine and Ingti has six. Different authorities like C.J Lyall in his 'Report on the Census of Assam 1881; Dalton in the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal 1845 and L.A Waddell, in the Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley 1900, have given different opinions regarding the classification of the Karbi tribe into clan or 'Kur'.[60] But despite their strenous

56. Mosera is described as one of the stations of the Isrealis in Wilderness (Deuteronomy 10:6 of the Bible)
57. Opcit, Dharamsing Teron (E.d) Karbi Studies Vol.- 1, P.- 207.
58. The Bible Deuteronomy 11:9
59. B.N. Bordoloi, G.C. Sarmah, Thakur and M.C Saikia, *Tribes of Assam*, Part-1, Tribal Research Institute, Guwahati, Page-56, Year-1987
60. S.T. Das, *The people of the Eastern Himalayas*, Sagar Publication, New Delhi-110001, P-65, Year-1978

effort, none of them could present the correct picture of the Karbi clans and the sub -clans. Thus a detail of all the five clans and their sub- clans is given below.

A) Inghee or Ejang. Number of sub- clans, 30. They are:

1. Inghee, 2.Rongpi, 3. Rongpi Ronghang 4. Rongpi Amri 5. Rongpi Chinthong 6. Rongpi Lindok 7. Rongpi Meji 8. Rongpi Rongchehon 9. Ronghi 10. Ke-ap 11. Rong-oi 12. Renglum 13. Rente 14. Lekthe 15. Bong rung 16. Kramsa 17. Hanse Lindok 18. Hanse Chin thong 19. Hanse Durong 20. Hanse Nongphili 21. Hanse Nonglada 22. Hanse Kalongtam 23. Ronghang 24. Ronghang Lindok 25. Tisso Rongphu 26. Tisso Rongchitim 27. Tisso Rongling 28. Tisso motho 29. Tisso Rong cheicho 30. Tisso.

B) Timung or Tungjang, Numbers of sub-clans, 30. They are:-
1. Timung, 2. Timung Rongpi 3. Timung Killing 4. Timung Phura 5. Phangcho 6. Phangcho Juiti 7. Phangcho Langteroi 8. Phangcho Ingnar 9. Phangcho Vojaru 10. Pator 11. Killing Meji 12. Killing Nokbare 13. Senar 14. Senar Muchiki 15. Senar Meji 16. Tokbi Ronghang 17. Tokbi Toktiki 18. Tokbi Chinthong 19. Tokbi Dera 20. Rongphar Senot 21. Rongphar Phura 22. Nokbare 23. Nongdu 24.Nonglada 25. Dera 26. Senar Pator 27. Senot 28. Chalut Senot 29. Mu Chophi 30. Tokbi Killing.

C) Terang or Hanjang, Number of Sub-clans, 15. They are:
1. Terang 2. Terang Ingnar 3. Terang Ingjai 4. Terang Dili 5. Terang Rong Cheicho 6. Be Ke-ik 7. Be Ke-et (Be Ronghang) 8. Be Chinthong 9. Be Dum 10. Be Lindok 11. Be Meji
12. Kro 13. Kro Nilip 14. Kro Nihang 15 Kro Khamu

D) Ingti or Lijang, Number of Sub-clans, 6. They are:-
1. Ingti Hensek 2. Ingti Kathar 3. Kathar Riso 4. Ingleng 5. Taro 6. Ingti Killing.

E) Teron or Kronjang, Number of Sub clans, 9. They are:
1. Millik 2. Kongkat 3. Langne 4. Sir-ang 5. Sir-ik 6. Dengja 7. Miji 8. Tro-op 9. Ai

The Sub-clans shown above may have disagreement and its names may differ from region to region. The fact is that many sub-clans are rarely used by the Karbi themselves and this often led to their inability to tell which sub-clan he or she belongs. This may be the factor why the British officials and Indian writers were unable to present a correct picture of the Karbi clan structure. Another interesting point is that the girl child in writing her clan or surname uses a suffix ‘Pi’ denoting a female. Thus, a girl from Terang clan will writeTerangpi

and a girl from Teron clan will write Teronpi and so on. The girl even after marriage retains her clan's name intact in her husband's family. Being Patrilineal, the children inherit the clan of their father. The clans are completely exogamous and marriage between a boy and a girl belonging to the same clan is a taboo and invite a heavy penalty of death sentence in the bygone past. A sexual act between a boy and a girl of the same clan is considered an act of incest, *'Kur senem'* in Karbi. Now, if any such case surfaces, a fine is imposed followed by separation of the erring individuals with proper social ritual. This process is strictly observed in the three cultural zones of Rongkhang, Chinthong and Amri in West Karbi Anglong. Of course, other areas too are expected to observe this in its totality after all the children of the same clan are considered brothers and sisters. A grown-up lad is addressed as *'Thare'* which is equivalent to the English, Mister. A grown-up young girl as *'Sami',* a married man *'Akehai'* or *'Sar'* and a married woman *'Sangpi'*. *Sarbura, Sarpi, Sarmar, Sarpimar, Risomar, Okarjang, Osomar* are meant for an old man, an old woman, a married man, a married woman, a young man, a young girl and children respectively.

Marriage : The first socially recognised marriage ceremony with elaborate rules and rituals was conducted during the tribe's sojourn in the borders of Burma and Thailand in a place called *'Muring Murrong'*.[61] by some [62] and *'Akliso'* village by others.[63] A marriage is called *'Adam Asar'* in Karbi. The marriage ceremony at '*Muring Murong*' was performed beneath the *Thelu* tree (Aonla, Amlokhi in Assamese). That is why all the songs sung during the marriage ceremony came to be known as *'Thelu Alun'*, or 'Thelu Songs'. It was unfortunate that the day fixed for the marriage ceremony was the day the Thai people (Shan Tai) came to give battle against the Karbis on the issue of pollution of the upper stream by the Karbis.[64] The following verses reveal about the incident that happened on that particular day.

"Muring pen Murong si junsok pathak rong.
(Muring and Murong are situated in the upstream)
Si Sumphi pen Sumphong
(That is why Sumphi and Sumphong)
Ron mai nanglo jong

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61. The Shan Tai called it, Mungri Mungram, Edward Gait, *History of Assam*, PP-73-74.
62. B.I Kathar, *Karbi Alamjir (Karbi History),* Published by H.B.I Kathar, Tika, Karbi Anglong, P-32 Year-1997
63. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *The Socio-Economic Life of the Karbis at a Glance*, P-71
64. Opcit, B.I Kathar, *Karbi Alamjir (Karbi History)*, P-34

(Came to give battle)
Chong anok Karbong
(With Shining Shield and Sword)
Ve Lie Lijong pen Che Lie Lijong
(Ve Lie Lijong and Che Lie Lijong)
Charnam Judun Kong
(Negotiated with them)
Nang Sumphi pen Sum Phong
(You Sumphi and Sum Phong)
Ron mai Che-o non
(Give up this battle)
Panini mejong bang
(This day being)
Harlongbi asong pen eru Harbamon
(Harlongbi and his group and Harbamon)
Muring Murong angbongsi
(Right in the heart of Muring Murong)
Damsar kapinchong
(Organised a marriage ceremony)
Honjeng kok lokbong
(Decorated with threads so bright)
Lale lang dun non.
(Come see and attend for yourselves)"

Ve Lie Lijong and Che Lie Lijong the sisters of Harbamon and Harlongbi diplomatically handled the situation and made Sumphi and Sumphong (Shan-Tai) give up the plan of battle. As per the invitation, Sumphi and Sum Phong attended the wedding ceremony at Muring Murong. The marriage was important because the rules and rituals framed became the guiding factor for future marriages of the Karbis which is followed even to this day. Accordingly,

1. A boy from the Teron clan shall marry a girl from the Terang clan.

2. A boy from Inghee clan shall marry a girl from the Timung clan.

3. A boy from the Timung clan shall marry a girl from the Teron Clan.

4. A boy from the Terang clan shall marry a girl from the Ingti and Ingleng clans.

5. A boy from the Ingti clan shall marry a girl from the Inghee Clan.

The Karbi marriage rules framed at Muring Murong dominated for many centuries and it is applicable even to this day. However, at present little importance was given to it and other than marrying a girl from his own clan which is a taboo a boy proposes the hand of a girl for marriage belonging to any of the remaining four clans. The practice now is slowly becoming a social problem. For example, if a boy from the Teron Clan and another boy from the Terang clan marry from the girls of Inghi clan, the children of both Teron and Terang shall be brothers and sisters since their mothers are from the same clan. But as a rule the children of Teron and Terang can never become brothers and sisters and in fact and as per the marriage rule framed at Muring Murong a boy from Teron clan has to marry a girl from Terang Clan. A time may come when all the children of all the five Karbi clans will become brothers and sisters making marriages difficult among them.

According to Charles Lyall,[65] 'The age for marriage is from fourteen to twentyfive for the man, ten to fifteen for the girl; eighteen or nineteen and fifteen are the most usual ages. Child marriage is unknown. If a young man fancies a girl, he sends one or both parents to her father's house, and if the girl's parents agree, the lad's father leaves a bethrothal ring or bracelet with the girl. This is called *'Kerai dun'* in Karbi. Sometimes, a gourd of rice beer is taken and accepted, and in that case, if she subsequently marries another, the village council fines her family 25 to 35 rupees; otherwise only the bethrothal ring or bracelet is returned. The length of the engagement is uncertain but the actual marriage does not take place till after puberty. When the marriage day is fixed, both families prepare beer and spirits; if the groom is rich, he provides drinks for the whole countryside. The parties giving a gourd of beer to each village they pass through arrive at the bride's house in the evening. There they sit a while and then offer one gourd of beer and one glass bottle of spirit to the bride's father on the *'hong'* (Verandah). A colloquy ensues: the brides, father asks the party why they have come, and why these offerings. He answers, "Your sister (ie, the wife of the speaker) is becoming old and can not work, so we have brought our son to marry your daughter". (The custom

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65. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs*, P-17

formerly was that a boy must marry his first cousin on the mother's side). The reply follows, "My daughter is unworthy, she does not know weaving and other household work," "Never mind, we will teach her ourselves". The bride's father then asks his wife to enquire the girl if she will take the lad; without her consent the beer and spirits can not be accepted. If the wife reports consent, the beer and the spirits are drunk by the two fathers. Sometimes they sit the whole night before the girl's consent is obtained. If any knowing old men are there, they sing in two parties. "We can not send our daughter to your house". "We can not leave our boy to stay with you". When the question of consent is settled, all eat together. Then the bride prepares the bed inside the house for the bridegroom, in the *'Kam'* in the *'Tibung',* (Name of rooms of Karbi traditional house) if there is room, if not, in the *'Thengthor'*, but if the lad is ashamed, he sends one of his garments to take his place in the bed.

What follows depends upon the wealth and standing of the parties. If the wedding is *'Akejoi'* that is, if no payment is to be made for the bride, the girl goes with her husband next day to her new home. Her parents accompany her and are entertained with food and drink, returning the following day. If the wedding is *'Akemen'* (Literally ripe Pakka) the lad stays in his Father-in-law's house. He rest one day, and then works for his Father-in-law for a year, or two years or even it maybe for life, according to agreement. If the girl is an heiress or only daughter, the marriage is usually *'Akemen'*.

However, whether *'Akejoi'* or *'Akemen'*, one is expected to follow the rules of marriage, *'Adam Asar'* sooner or later. Even the married couple who elope and did not perform the procedure according to 'Adam Asar' shall have to perform even in their old age. It is due to the following reasons. (1)If the married couple failed to perform their marriage obligation even, during old age (i.e. eloped couple) the wife after her demise will not get a place for cremation in the assigned crematorium. In cremation, the five Karbi clans have five separate crematoriums called *'Tipit'* and the deceased wife of a person should be cremated in the place where her husband is cremated or would be cremated. (2) Until and unless the married couple performs the *'Adam Asar'*, marriage of their children can not take place. (3) A rare disease or diseases used to attack a child, where modern medicinal system failed to find a solution. The behaviour of the sick child like biting the nail, pulling of hair, rectum coming out of the anus and other Psychological problems are taken to be diseases which needed the help of the maternal uncle. Such a disease is called, *'Nihu Kacheri'* in Karbi meaning, seeking of maternal uncle. A four stage ritual has to be performed by the parents of the sick child giving respect and reverence to the maternal uncle of the sick child. Sometimes, a grown up

man and woman too fell victims to these diseases. The ritual for curing the sick person is called *'Vo Kartap'* in Karbi. In Assamese it is called *'Mumai Puja'*. There is a lamenting folk tale relating to the origin of *'Vo Kartap'* ritual. A married couple who failed to perform the *'Adam Asar'* maybe taken by the maternal uncle of the sick child as an insult and hence may not be willing to perform the ritual for curing the sick child. The marriage ritual under *'Adam Asar'* has five stages. They are:

1) *Nengpi Nengso Kachingki* (Preliminary talk between the mother of the boy and the mother of the girl)

2) *Lam athir Kachebi or Banta Kachingthum* (Commitment of the talk previously held)

3) *Kapatini or Kehangpi* (Confirmation or the final stage)

4) *Ajo Arni Kepha* (Fixing the date of the marriage)

5) *Adam Asar* (Kapangri). (The marriage Ceremony)

Besides the five stages, there are post marriage religious and social rituals to be performed by the newly wedded couple. The morning after the marriage ceremony, worship is conducted to appease the God of Household called, *'Hemphu'* for asking long, happy conjugal life of the newly wedded couple. This worship is called *'Vur Kamatha'*.

The next practice is the *'Tovar Adeng Kecho'*. Here, the couple will be given lunch half way before reaching the house of the groom.

The last ritual is the *'Peso riso Kachethon'*. Here, both the wedded couple visit the bride's parents house to return the dress, attire that she wore on the wedding day.

Edward Stack, while making his enquiries found that there was little mingling between the sexes, but when it did, the parents of the girls has to give her to the lad in marriage. It was not punished. Old men way back in 1855 narrated that when the *'Terang'* (Bachelor's Dormitory) used to be not only the abode of the lads but also of the maids, illegitimate births were common.[66] In the institution of *'Jir Kedam'* or Co-operative farming, both young boys and girls work together in the field and there was not even a matron to look after the girls.

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66. Ibid, P-19

Adultery after marriage is rare but in case of any, the village council convenes a *'Mai'* (*'Me'* in Lyall's book) and punished the guilty.

In 1883, when Edward Stack prepared his report for the Assam Census of 1881, he stated that "Polygamy is permitted if a man can afford it". But his subsequent notes of 1885-86, however recorded that monogamy is the rule and no one is allowed to marry two wives. W.C.M Dundass, the Sub-divisional Officer of North Cachar writing in 1903 says that an 'Arleng' (Mikir/Karbi) may marry only one wife. On the other hand, Rev P.E Moore, who had a long experience of the Mikirs now Karbis, writing in 1902 opines that, "polygamy is not common but a man sometimes, takes a second wife. In one instance which came to his notice, the two wives were married to one man on the same day. The man was fined Rs. 12.8 for his irregularity." The father of a boy who was in his service had six wives and was not punished at all.[67] It may be said that monogamy is the general rule but polygamy even though rare, was practised by some.[68] In some cases, some men marry two wives from the same family. But it is accidental rather than natural. When the wife became pregnant, usually her parents used to send their younger unmarried daughter to help her sister and brother-in-law in the domestic chores. Here, her brother-in-law seduced her and later keep her as his second wife. The man can always ask the hand of his unmarried sister-in-law after the death of his wife and the parents of the girl can not object to such a proposal. Widow re-marriage is permitted and the younger brother as a rule has to marry his elder brother's widow. In case of refusal or absence of a younger brother, the widow should marry a person belonging to her deceased husband's Clan. If she marries another Clan, then a serious offence called 'Me Kehung' shall be framed against her. Divorce is rare but permissable if there is no off spring or if the girl goes home after marriage and refuses to return to her husband. In that case, the husband takes a gourd of beer to her parents and declares himself free. Both the parties after divorce can marry again.

Rules of inheritance: According to Charles Lyall, "The sons inherit, if there are none, the brother; after them the deceased; nearest agnate of his own *'Kur'* or Clan. The wife and daughters get nothing. But if the deceased has no son or brothers, the widow can retain the property by marrying into her husband's *'Kur'* or Clan. In any case she retains her personal property like ornaments, cloths etc. If the widow will not surrender the property the case has to come before the *'Me' (Mai).* The eldest son gets some what more than the others and the

67. Ibid, P-20
68. Ibid, P-21

property is divided before hand by the father, who often prefers one son to another. The family usually continues to dwell together, the grown up sons supporting the widowed mother. Adoption is unknown.

The Karbi society is Patrilineal and inheritance also follows the same line. On the death of the father, the eldest son if unmarried, takes over the responsibility of the family and also inherits the property otherwise the responsibility of the family fall on the younger son.[69]

Daughters have no claim at all to the father's property, but they share the property of their mother who distributes her personal properties equally among her daughters during her life time. Immovable property like land is distributed equally among the sons during the father's life time. In case of any dispute, it is referred to the *Mai* or Village Council whose decision over the matter is always taken as final. Such cases are however rare and the sons are generally well satisfied according to the will of the father. It is the duty of the son to look after the well being of the daughters of the deceased, who are looked after in this manner as they are unmarried. Similarly, the wife of the deceased is also cared for as long as she remains a widow.

Dress and ornaments: In dress according to Lyall, 'the Mikir (Karbi) man imitates the Khasi to whom he seems to have lived in subjection in former times. On his head he wears a turban *(Poho)* but formerly the Khasi cap *(Phu-tup)* of black or red cloth was more usually worn. On his loins he wears a dhoti *(rikong)* of cotton cloth and sometimes if wealthy of silk. His coat is sleeveless striped jacket *(Choi)* with a long fringe covering the buttocks and coming round infront *(Choi apre)*. In cold weather, he wears a thick wrapper of eri silk called 'Pe ingki' (in Assamese, *Bor Kapur*). The legs are uncovered and shoes are not worn.[70]

Tanmay Bhattacharjee writes, "A Karbi man wears a loin cloth called *'Rikong'*[71] S.T. Das observes, "Generally boys donot put on *'Choi'* or *'Poho'* (Turban) but will sometimes put on *'Rikong'* along with shirt or wear shirts, pants and coats particularly those who are living in towns always wear the European dress, which has become the fashion"[72] B.N Bordoloi

69. Opcit, S.T. Das, *The people of Eastern Himalayas*, P-123
70. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs,* P-6
71. Opcit, Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis*, P-36
72. Opcit, S.T Das, *People of Eastern Himalayas*, P-138

and his colleagues observe that, "The Karbis have their traditional dresses which are artistically designed. The dresses are woven at their family looms. There are separate dresses for men and women. The aged men use an artistically designed shirt called *'Soinangpo'*, (Which should be called *'Choidingpo'*) and the shirt use by the young men is called *'Soihothor'* (Which should mean *'Choihongthor*'). The men use a loin cloth called *'Rikong'*. But nowadays, the male persons have abandoned its use. Only in the remote interior place *'Rikong'* is found to be used specially by married and aged persons. The use of turban called *'Poho'* is also fast disappearing" [73]

The women wear a petticoat *(Pini)* secured round the waist by an ornamental girdle (*Vankok* or *Vamkok*). The petticoat is of white and red striped eri cloth. The upper part of the body is covered with the *'Jiso'*, a wrapper passing under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts. The head is uncovered and the hair is drawn back and tied in a knot behind.[74] Now, the *'Jiso'* a wrapper is no more worn. A modern blouse is used by the young and aged alike and a *'Pekok'* (Overgarment) which covers both the upper portion and lower portion of the body is worn. The *'Pekok'* has different variety of designs. A young girl wears different designs of *'Pekok'* like *'Prejangphong', Khonjari, Dukphirso* and *Pejangprot* while a woman puts on *'Peluru'* and *'Pe sarpi'*. Now, modification has made its presence felt in every walks of life and the dress of the Karbi women folk is also not free from this trend. No doubt the traditional dress underwent a change of design and more and better looking designs of Pini, *Pekok* and *Vamkok* are available to the womenfolk. Even the different varieties of Karbi shawls are a modern invention. The male. *'Choihongthor'* a sleeveless open jacket too comes in different designs. The Karbi women and young girls are very fond of their traditional dresses and they have been using these dresses even in the face of a strong competition from modern dresses.

The cloths are made mainly from cotton grown locally. The wooden loom is called *'Pe Therang'*. The wheel on which the cotton is spun is called *'Mi Therang'*. The Karbi women folk are also well adept in eri silk production.[75] The cocoon of the Attacus Ricini is fed on the castor plant and is then woven in course fabric. It was called *'Pe Ingki'* (Bor Kapur) and is used in the winter season. The thread is dyed with the juice of indigo leaves.

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73. Opcit, B.N. Bordoloi, G.C Sarmah and others, *Tribes of Assam Pt-I,* PP-68- 95.
74. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs,* P-6
75. Opcit, S.T Das, *People of Eastern Himalayas*, PP-96-97

The parts of a Karbi loom given by S.T Das are as follows.[76]

a. *Thehu* - A cane belt used on loin of weaver to fasten and tighten the loom.

b. *Harpi* - A piece of pointed and flat wooden or bamboo stick used as reed.

c. *Thoning* - A round bar of wood or bamboo on which threads of the loom are wrapped.

d. *Honthari* - A rod of bamboo on which the thread is wound.

e. *Honthai Langpong* - A bamboo tube in wich Honthari is kept.

f. *Uwek* - Small rods of bamboo.

g. *Ule* - Long rods of bamboo like uwek.

h. *Takeri* - A kind of bobbin.

i. *Honlam* - A bamboo or wooden stick on both sides of which small bars are fitted as cross and threads are wrapped on it.

j. *Sirki* - A spool.

k. *Thelangpong* - Bamboo pipe for helping the healds.

l. *Hi-i* - Healds

m. *Honki Chongbong*- Bamboo or wooden stick wed for drying eri cocoon.

n. *Ingthi* - A reed of loom.

o. *Ponglang* - Same as Thelangpong but small in size.

p. *Therang* - Round bar of wood.

q. *Barlim* - A flat and small rod of bamboo.

One area of concern in the use of traditional dress by the Karbi women nowadays is the high price and time involved in making the dress. As the dresses are still made in the traditional way the high price involved is beyond the reach of many. These dresses other than

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76. Ibid, S.T. Das, PP 96-97

landing in the wardrobe of well to do Karbi women, the poor can not afford to have it. It would be reasonably wise to weave the cloths in different qualities so that these can be offered at different prices. Of late, Plainsmen who are traders have started to produce some traditional dresses of the Karbis at a much cheaper rates. This trend if allowed to proceed unhindered will lead to the disruption of traditional weaving which the Karbi women are known for.

The women wear a characteristic ornament of a large tube made of silver which is inserted into a hole pierced in the lobe of the ear known as *'Nothengpi'*.[77] Men wear an earring made of gold or silver called *'Norik'* which is suspended from the lobe of the ear. Necklaces called *'Lek'* made of beads and inserted with several old coins are worn by both married women as well as young girls. Rings called *'Arnan'* and bracelets *'Roi'* made of gold and silver are worn by both the sexes. Men also wear the feathers of Bhim Raj *(Vojaru)* bird inserted in the turban on festive occassions.

Women generally keep long hair and it is straight and tied in a knot, *'Chubi'* behind the head. Men cut their hair short and seldom care to comb their hair, if at all they do, they comb it flat. Old men of yesteryears keep long hair and tie in a knot at the back just like the women. Nails, '*Chimi'* are trimmed and teeth are cleaned with a piece of small tree branch usually of neem, mango and others. Footwear is seldom used by both the sexes. The modern age has however made drastic change in dress and fashion.

Domestic life: The Karbis are agriculturists. Their proper habitat is in the hills. Villages are located within their defined geographical boundary called *(Havar)* which is traditionally owned by the Headman of the village. The Headman is called by various names such as *'Sarthe' 'Rong Asar' 'Achom Asar'* etc. The cultivation is done in the hills by clearing the forest. Jhum cultivation, as it is commonly called is shifting in nature. A particular site is cultivated only for two or three years maximum. A new cultivation site in the hills is called *'Ang-ui'* and an old site is called *'Aram'*. Each villager secures the permission of the Headman about the choice of the site for cultivation for the current year. Once a site is chosen, the person installs a mark of identification for claiming the particular site. This is called *'Tap Kesom'*. When an identification mark is installed at a particular place, another person can not intrude into it.

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77. Opcit, Dr. A.M. Meerwarth, *The Andamese*, *Nicobarese and the Hill Tribes of Assam*, P-35.

The jungle clearing is done in the month of February and burning of the site in March. Cropping is done in the month of April. The cropping is multiples in nature. Along with the special variety of paddy which is cultivable on dry land, other crops are grown at the same site. Crops like sesame, maize, millet and vegetable and edible leaves like yam, brinjal, lady finger, pumpkin, cucumber of different varieties, mint, meshta etc are cultivated alongside the paddy. Varieties of edible tuber called '*Phurui'* are also grown. The names of paddy which the Karbis cultivate on dry land in the hills are, *'Chubok', 'Sok Langlu'*, and *'Sok Miri'*. These are rich source of vitamin B. Like the Khasis and Jaintias of the rural areas, the Karbis of interior areas are accustomed to eating the red rice varieties. The *'Dimro'* paddy is found mentioned in the folk song called *'Sok keplang'* meaning, 'Discovery of paddy'. The paddy as a staple food was discovered by them during their stay in Burma. The *'Dimro'* is the first variety of Paddy known to the Karbis. They called the paddy *'Dimro'* as *'Sok Akleng'* meaning, eldest of the paddy. The Karbis also brought a variety of paddy cultivable through the wet method from Burma. The paddy is called *'Rengkun'*. The name is similar to the Burmese capital 'Rangoon' (Yangoon) K.C Tensuba writes that, "Tribals groups coming from the north of the mountain (in Burma) moved down to learn the art of wet rice cultivation. The later ones or the weaker groups were pushed into the mountain to learn only the slash and burn method.[78]

Being agriculturists, the twelve months of a year are prepared with various work assignments. The New Year called *'Ningkan Kimi'* or *'Sengkan Kimi'* in poetical term starts from the month of February, the month where they identify the site for Jhum. The twelve work assignments for the twelve months are as follows:

1) *Thang Thang* (February), Sobriquet, *'Rit Lang'*, meaning, identification of the site in the hills for Jhum.

2) *There* or *Therepo* (March), Sobriquet, *'Mamte'* meaning, drying of the trees, plants and shrubs in the Sun which are already cleared.

3) *Jangmi* (April) Sobriquet, *'Me-ri'* meaning, a sunny dry month where fire can be procured by rubbing the combustible dry bamboo. It is called 'Me Kelap' in Karbi. The month is also assigned for burning of the site and clearing it to be fit for cultivation.

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78. K.C Tensuba, *Genesis of India Tribes*, Inter India Publications, New Delhi-110015, P-38 Year -1993

4) *Aru* (May) Sobriquet, *'Rit Nong Chingdi'* meaning, sowing of the paddy in unison. We must note here that the paddy is not sowed and unlike the wet method, a nursery is not made; the paddy is scattered by hand followed by slight digging with the hoe

5) *Vosik* (June), Sobriquet, *'Hen-up Kardik'* meaning, preparation of the edible bamboo shoot. Bamboo shoots added with other vegetables is a delicacy. The bamboo shoots are prepared in the following ways.

    a) *Up-Vai*: Bamboo shoots are cut to pieces and boiled with water. The water is strained and the bamboo shoot is cooked by frying. It is also cooked with other vegetables seasoned with edible soda. The preparation of curry using edible soda is called *'Kangmoi'* in Karbi.

    b) *Up-Thor*: Bamboo shoots are cut to pieces and put in a bowl filled with water. The preparation is kept for few days and through the process of fermentation, the bamboo shoots as well as the water in the bowl soon turned sour. Cooking the sour bamboo shoots and juice with pork is a delicacy. This method of eating bamboo shoot is the most common.

    c) *Hen-Up Akreng*: Bamboo shoots are cut to pieces and dried in the Sun. It is then cooked with other vegetables.

6) *Jakhong* (July) Sobriquet, *Hen-Up Kardong* meaning, bamboo shoots reaching a considerable height. By this month, the bamboo shoots in the bamboo plant reach a considerable height. The bamboo shoots are collected and cut to pieces. The pieces are then crushed with the help of a pestle and a hollow wooden mortar called 'Lengpum' and 'Long' in Karbi. The crushed bamboo shoots are kept in a bamboo cylinder attached with a tight lid. The bamboo cylinder with bamboo shoots inside will be buried in the soil for seven to eight months. After this, it will be taken out from the soil and is ready for use along with other vegetables.

7) *Pai Pai* (August) Sobriquet, *'Sok Mandu Lutjai'*, meaning, the paddy in the Jhum are fully grown and it even reach upto the surroundings of the little rest hut built in the Jhum.

8) *Chiti* (September) Sobriquet, *'Hen-Up-Ahi,* meaning, extracting the juice of bamboo shoot. There is a method of extracting the juice of bamboo shoot mixed with pork. It is

called *'Hen-Up Ahi'*. This method is done individually as well as collectively. A temporrary shed free from rain is constructed and a platform is made under it. A bamboo basket is made with a hollow at the base. A pig is then slaughtered and the meat is then mixed with the chopped bamboo shoots in the proportion of 1:3. The mixture is then kept in the bamboo basket and within days, drops of juice will drop from the hollow outlet. The juice is collected in a bamboo cylinder and after three or four months the whole juice is collected. The collected juice as well as the remains of the mixture is then shared among the villagers and other traditional dignatories including the Headman at whose order the preparation is made. Sometimes many villages take part in making the preparation.

9) *Phre* (October) Sobriquet, *'Sokthe'* meaning, the paddy is ripened and it is ready for harvesting.
10) *Phaikuni* (November) Sobriquet, *'Sok Bui Pangni'* meaning, the harvested paddy are brought in the threshing place called 'Jimtim'.

11) *Matijong* (December) Sobriquet, '*Sok Bui Chejong'*, meaning, time to proudly point the finger at the unthreshed mound of paddy and find whose paddy has the largest amount.

12) *Arkoi* (January) Sobriquet, *'Sokroi'* meaning, gathering of paddy from the threshing place to be stored in the granary, which is called, *'Puru'* in Karbi.

The villages of the Mikir stand in clearings in the forest and are shifted as soon as the soil is exhausted. The houses are large, often containing the families of married sons as well as the original family. They are built on posts and the floor is raised several feet above the ground. They are built of bamboo, slit and flattened out. The roof is made of san grass.[79]

The traditional Karbi house is large and substantial and is strongly put together. Colonel Dalton wrote in the 'Ethnology of Bengal' that the Karbis have the habit of lodging several families or even the whole village in one house.[80] The inhabitants of a house are all of one family, and may often be numerous.

79. Opcit, Dr. A.M. Meerwarth, *The Andamese, Nicobarese and the Hill Tribes of Assam,* P-35.
80. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs*, P-7

The traditional Karbi house is built on posts and the floor is raised several feet above the ground. The material of the super structure is bamboo, slit and flattened out and the roof isthatched with san grass called *'Phelang' in Karbi'*. Nails and wires are not used and instead bamboo strips *'Jintak'* and the inner bark of a tree, *'Jinsikong'* in Karbi are used for tying. A moderate elevation with a flat top is preferred for building; a slope can be taken if no better site can be found.

The house is divided lengthwise by a partition called *'Arpong'* into *'Kam'* the guest or servant Chamber and *'Kut'* the living room of the family. *'Kam'* is on the right side as one enters and the only door into the house leads into it. In *'Kam'* a platform called *'Tibung'* raised above the floor, runs along the outside wall; this maybe divided off laterally into rooms for sleeping. In *'Kut'* separated off by a partition on the side of the outer wall is a long narrow chamber, one bamboo diameter lower than the floor called *'Voroi'* in which the fowls and goats are kept at night. It has a seperate door called *'Voroi amehan'*. In *'Kut'* towards the back is the fireplace called, *'mehip'*. The space before it is, *'damthak'* where the family sleep and the bamboo paddy receptacle, *'ingkro'* in Karbi stands. Behind the place is, *'dambuk'* a vacant space here, the grown up daughters or old women sleeps. Between the fire and the *'Voroi'* is the rice spot where rice is kept. It is called *'Sangrangtik'*. Between the fire and the partition is the *'Kut Athengthor'* a space for miscellaneous articles. Above the *'Voroi'* a shelf is raised under the roof called *'Vo-Harlip'* used for keeping pots etc. Opposite the fire place is a door leading into *'Kam'*.

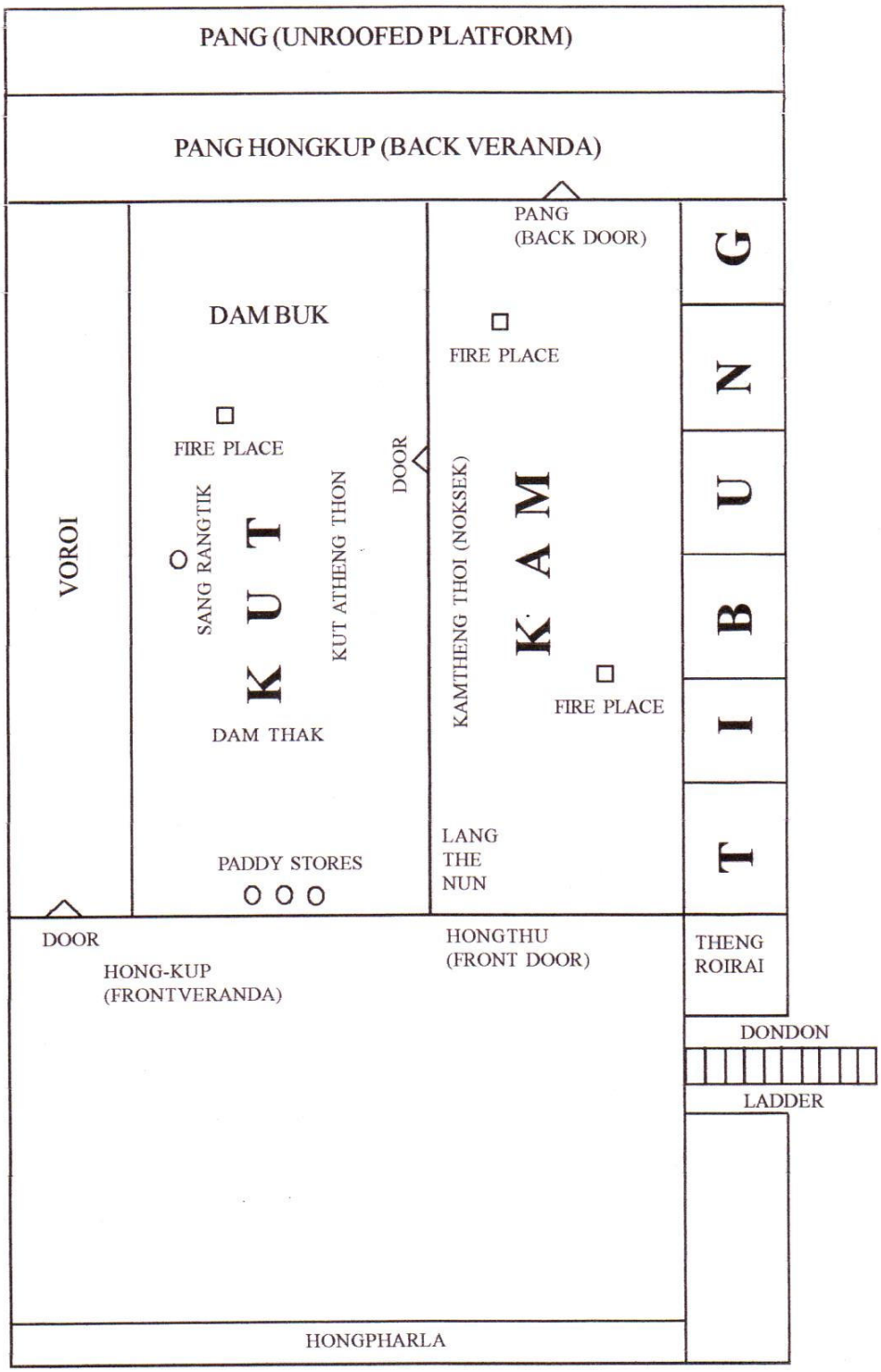
In *'Kam'* if the house is large there are two fireplaces. Before the fire, the space is called *'Kam Atheng thot'* or *'Noksek'*. In the corner of the front wall and the partition are put, the stored water called *'Langthenun'*. The front door is called *'Hongthu'* the back door *'Pang'* or *'Pang Hongthu'*.

The front veranda is called *'Hong Kup'*. The *'Tibung'* runs out into it and the part beyond the front wall of the house is called *'Thengroi rai'* the place for keeping the firewood. Beyond the *'Hongkup'* the Platform extends unroofed called *'Hongplang'* but disconnected with the *'Theng roi rai'*, between it and the latter is the ladder called *'Dondon'* to gain access to the platform. Usually, the ladder is made of a tree trunk. The *'Hongpharla'* may extend also across the front of the house; it is roofed over, but opens towards the house. Similarly, at the back of the house are the *'Pang Hongkup'* or back veranda and the unroofed *'Pang'* beyond.

No ladder gives access to this. Under the house is the pig sty and infront is a yard or compound called *'Tikup'* usually fenced around.

The furniture of the house is the simplest description. The floor or a raised platform of bamboo, serves as a bed. A block of wood, *'Inghoi' 'Pira'* in Assamese is used as a stool to sit on. Baskets of bamboo and cane *'Khalun'* are employed as cupboards in which to store the household goods, the paddy (*Ingkro* and *Dur*) and the cloths *(Banvak)*, Joints of bamboo. *'Langthe'* or *'Langbong'* (dried hollow gourd) are used for holding water.

PLAN OF KARBI TRADITIONAL HOUSE



TIKUP

(YARD OR COMPOUND USUALLY FENCED ROUND)

According to Edward Stack, the most important institution from the point of view of agriculture was the association or club of the young men of the village from twelve to twenty years called *'Maro'* or *'Terang'*. It is also called *'Pharla'*. It is reported that the useful form of cooperation is now falling into desuetude. This institution was prevalant when the Karbi society practised collective cooperation farming where the produce was owned collectively by the village. With the onset of individual and private property, this practice died down. Charles Lyall writes that "work is enforced by penalties. They used to roast those who shirked their share; now they beat them for failure to work. If the *Klengsarpo* (leader of the youth cooperative farming) finds a lad refractory, he reports him to the Goanbura." [81]

There were times where there is no *'Terang'* but the institution survived for some period where the young lads, *'Risomar'* stayed in the Headman's house in the *'Hongpharla'*, the place in which strangers are lodged. They send a boy to bring their food from their homes and all eat together. Each man's share is brought in a leaf bundle called *'Anbor'* to keep it warm.

In 1978, S.T Das writes, "the bachelors hall or *'Terang'* where young boys used to sleep at night is still found among the Karbis in the interior villages of the high hills."[82] Usually the *'Sarthe'*, the Headman of the village will instruct the bachelors of the village to construct a house where they could assemble and sleep at night. Such houses are generally built by all the young boys of the village under the supervision of the Headman. Membership to the *'Terang'* is open to all young boys in the village irrespective of *'Kurs'* or *sub-Kurs*. Generally a boy after attaining twelve years of age ceases to sleep with his parents at night and comes to sleep along with other youths in the bachelor's hall. The members of the bachelor's hall besides their main assignment that is to work collectively, dance and sing accompanied by drums and flute during the festivals or even on ordinary days if they feel like. The collective work programme is called *'Jir Kedam'*. Here, the grown up boys are joined by the girls and they work together in the Jhum.

According to Tanmay Bhattacharjee, the *'Basapo'* an Officer under *'Habe'* (a traditional judge) is In charge of the bachelor's dormitory.[83] But as the institution existed in every village, the Headman of the village as written by Lyall and others seems to be more

81. Ibid, P-12
82. Opcit, S.T. Das, *The People of Eastern Himalayas,* P-106.
83. Opcit, Tanmay Bhattcharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis,* P-61.

correct. Also, the institution has nothing to do with judicial matters. It is an institution for collective farming and a training ground for the youths in every aspect of life. The collective farming, according to Tanmay Bhattacharjee was originally designed to include male members only but now the females are also members of the association. Of course, they are not allowed to stay in the bachelor's hall at night and the sex discipline is an exemplary evidence of the success of the system. The young girls are members of the association only and did not occupy any post of the institution. The girls do the cooking and other works and help the boys in all matters. The *'Terang'* is not merely a club but an institution of learning. The young boys and girls in unision learn the various skills like cultivation, handicraft, songs and music, rituals, history, weaving, tidbit of family life and village defence.

The Headman calls the people together and proposes that, having so many lads in the village, they should start a lad's club. If agreed to, the union of the youth is formed and the lads take up their quarters in his house untill a separate house is built. The club is organized under regular officers appointed among themselves. They are:

a. *Kleng Sarpo* - Leader

b. *Klengdun* - Deputy Leader

c. *Sodar Kethe* - Assistant Leader

d. *Sodarso or Phanderi* - Deputy Asst. Leader.

e. *Barlon Kethe* - Carrier of the measuring rod.

f. *Barlonso* - Deputy carried of the measuring rod.

g. *Sangho Kerai Kethe* - Group Leader

h. *Sangho Kerai so* - Deputy Group Leader

i. *Cheng Burup Kethe* - Drummer

j. *Cheng Burup so* - Deputy Drummer

k. *Motan Ar-e* - Keeper of the right strip of the field.

l. *Motan Ar-vi* - Keeper of the left strip of the field.

m. *Langbong Kethe* - Water Supplier

n. *Langbong So* - Deputy Water Supplier.

o. *Chin Hak Kethe* - Keeper of things

p. *Chin Hak So* - Deputy Keeper of things

q. *Me Api* - Fire Keeper or incharge

r. *Lang Apai* - Water keeper or incharge

s. *Arphekpo* - Cleaner of the place

t. *Phankri* - Personal Assistant of the leader

u. *Klem rap aso* - Ordinary members without specific charge.

Blacksmith, *'Hemai'* in Karbi have existed among them from remote times and they can fashion their knives and various iron implements. They also make needles and hooks for fishing. The old umbrella ribs are in much demand for their manufacture. Silver and gold ornaments are also made by them but they rely mainly, from the Khasi and Jaintia traders. Pottery is made without the help of the wheel. It is thick, durable and well burnt. In all these branches of manufacture the tendency however is to depend upon outside market.

Hunting with spears and dogs is practised. The objects of the chase are deer, Boer, fowls and others. The dog barks and follows up the track by scent. A variety of traps called *'Pham'* are used to catch wild animals and birds. Some of the local names of traps are *Pham Dongphlup, Pham Riso, Pham Parkup,* and *Arhang*. *Arhang* is a trap for killing a tiger. Sharp pointed bamboos are placed to be discharged from a spring formed by a bent sapling. A rope of creeper stretched across the path releases the spring when the tiger passes that way and comes against it. A goat or a cock is placed in the site as the bait. The hunting is mainly done in the winter months when there is no agricultural works.

Like hunting, fishing is also practised with equal enthusiasm. Both men, women and young boys and girls take part. Fishing by hook *'Arhi'* is called *'Ok Kaparhi'* in Karbi.

Earthworm and a special variety of fish, *'Ok Langso'*, *'Cheng mas'* in Assamese are used as the bait. Fishing done by placing trap of various types which is called 'Ru' in Karbi is called *'Ru Kedu'*. A bund is made and the trap is kept in the middle of the bund where water flows. It is left overnight and the fishes if any are collected in the morning. Clearing of water and draining by means of bucket and a specially made implement for the purpose called *'Kongsin'* on a small water body in the field and ponds is called *'Ok Kesi'*. Another method of fishing is by poisoning the water body by means of a poisonous root and fruit called *'Hiru'* and *'Ruthe'* The Karbis practise the traditional community fishing through this method. It is called *'Ok Kepru'*. This practice is prevalent in West Karbi Anglong. The twelve cultural zones of 'Rongkhang Longri' are assigned different fishing sites in the Karbi Langpi River, the Kopili and other smaller rivers. For example, for the *'Habepi'* cultural Zone the fishing site is assigned at a place called, *'Inghin Abi'* at the Karbi Langpi River. For *'Umnarong'* cultural zone, the fishing site is at *'Tharve Abi'* in the same river and so on. The assigned site of fishing is called *'Rubo'*. Each cultural zone is to fish in their assigned site and intrusion to other sites is forbidden. If fishing of such nature is to be undertaken by a particular zone, the traditional administrative officers like the Habes and other subordinate officers of the particular zone fix the date of fishing and news is conveyed to all the headmen of the villages within the zone. The headmen order their villagers to produce and contribute a bundle or two of the poisonous root. On the appointed day the poisonous roots are taken to the fishing site and scores of men will beat the roots to make it into a pulp. The juice is then collected and poured in the water. Everyone, irrespective of caste, creed and community are welcomed to join and take part in the fishing. A catch of bigger fish is divided between the organisers and the person on a fifty fifty basis. For this, volunteers are appointed and they collect the lower portion of the fish giving the upper portion to the rightful owner. Later, the collected fishes will be divided among the organisers, all the headmen and other dignatories. However, if any woman catches a bigger fish, she is allowed to take it without having to divide it between her and the organisers. Imitating the plainsmen and other communities, fishing is also done by nets of various types.

The staple food is rice, which is husked in the usual way that is, pounding with a long pestle in a wooden mortar. The rice is mainly cooked by women of the family. Those who practise the wet method of cultivation are following the latest method and techniques and use hybrid seeds like other communities. As deforestation is not encouraged by the government, the paddy varieties cultivable in the hills did not underwent any research to double its output. The paddy of bygone days was preserved and these are still cultivated even to this day. The

Karbis cultivate the sticky rice of different varieties. One unique method of cooking rice is the use of bamboo cylinder, *'Langpong'* instead of a cooking pot. This method of cooking rice is called *'An Kemung'*. Rice of the sticky type is the most preferred. In this method, the rice will be poured in the bamboo cylinder along with water. The mouth of the cylinder is then covered by banana leaves. The bamboo cylinder will be burned in the flame of the fire and will be removed from the fire only when the outer layer of the bamboo cylinder is completely burnt. Cooking rice by this method has a special flavour and taste. Meat like pork, chicken and even fish are also cooked in this method on special occasion or when one feel like to do.

According to Charles Lyall the flesh of cows is not eaten and there is said to be a dislike even to keep them, but this prejudice is now dying out. But according to S.T Das, the Karbis eat all kinds of flesh including beef.[84] In the story of the 'Orphan and his uncles' found in Lyall's book, beef was the main theme. One may thus like to have a conjecture that before the influence of Hinduism the Karbis might have ate all kinds of flesh including beef just like the Aryans who were the progenitor of Hinduism. Before cows came to be revered, beef was a delicacy even to the Aryans. The Ramayana of Valmiki and Shatapath Brahmana have references centering aroung this. But the present trend of the tribe is that eating beef is forbidden among the Karbis. It was when a section of them embraced Christianity that the Christian group started consuming. In the past there used to be a *'Mai'*, village council meeting and imposition of fine, *'Adai Areng'* even to a Karbi Christian who consumes it. But now, it is much relaxed and a Karbi Christian has his free will to decide whether to consume it or not without any hesitation or fear. Along with flesh of various animals and birds, eggs and fish are eaten. Meat is either roosted or cooked. It is also dried over the fire in the *'Chang'* or 'Rap'. The meat sometimes is dried in the Sun. Dry fish is also consumed by them. It is procured from the market. Dry fish is also prepared by them by simply drying the fishes by the fire side or under the Sun. Vegetables called *'Han'* (poetic term, *Jirhu*) of all kinds including wild vegetables mainly leaves, fruits, stem, roots etc. are consumed. A wide variety of edible wild leaves are known. The Karbis also eat the Chrysalis of the 'Eri Worm' (Attacus ricini). It is eaten roosted, boiled and curried. It is a delicacy and it is sold in the local markets. Varieties of spices are known to them. They are, *'Hanso'* (ginger), *'Lopong'* or *'Lopong birik'* (mint), *'Vorek Ajokasu'* (a scented leaf grown wild now domesticated), *'Theng Kiching'* (cinnamon) *'Nempo'* (Sesame) beside others. The Karbis eat varieties of wild edible

84. Opcit, S.T. Das, *The people of Eastern Himalayas,* P-67

mushrooms called *'Kimu'*. They are expert to differentiate the edible varieties and the non-edible poisonous ones. The hot and humid climate offers a range of mushrooms in the surroundings specially, in the hills. The local names of such edible mushrooms are, *Mu Lokso, Mu Phang, Mu-si, Mu Plakplak, Mu-rik, Mu plong, Mu Sokpun* etc.

Men, women and children eat together within the house. The right hand is used in eating. Banana leaves, *'lo Arvo'* are used as plates but metal plates *'Kasu'* and cups *'Harlung'* are also used, by them. Knife, rice spoon and fork are not used while eating. Meal is usually eaten twice a day, one in the morning before work and the other in the evening after work. Before eating, the grown up male members invoke the blessings of God by putting aside a pinch of food. This practice is called *'Arnam Kepu'*.

The Karbis love liquor and are addicted to it.[85] On any occassion be it religious or social the involvement of liquour is compulsory. Drinking liquor is the main cause of backwardness and other social problems. The health and longevity of a person who drinks heavily are affected making his family expose to social evils. The liquor is of three types namely, *Arak, Horlang* and *Horpo*. To prepare liquor, the cooked rice is well broken up on a mat. It is then mixed with a ferment called *'Thap'*. The *'Thap'* is made of powdered rice mixed with certain kinds of leaves. The mixture is made into cakes and dried in the Sun and is ready for use when required. After the *'Thap'* is thoroughly mixed with the rice, the latter is heaped up and covered with plantain leaves on the mat. In three or four days in the hot weather, fermentation sets in; in the cold weather a longer time is required. *'Arak'* is a spirit and is the strongest. *Horlang* and *Horpo* are forms of beer.

Opium, 'Kani' which was introduced by the alien masters was once largely used by the Karbis. Almost all male adults indulge themselves in taking the drug. The Council Authority and the Government of Assam had a hard time in eradicating this general bad habit. De addiction centres were set up at Diphu and Vothatlangso (Baithalangso).[86] The effort of the Government was successful and now it has become a thing of the past. Tabacco, *'Duma'* is smoked and chewed with betal nut, lime and betal leaves. A smoke pipe made of bamboo and burnt clay is used. The *'hookah'* is also used by them for smoking. A leaf of a tree *'Loring*

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85. A.J. Moffat Mills, '*Report on Assam'* Gyan Publishing House, Delhi, P-CXXXIII, Year-1980 (Reprinted)

86. Opcit, An interview with S.S Teron. S.S Teron worked as Incharge at the Opium de-addiction centre at Baithalangso.

Arvo' is used as a wrapper of the tabacoo. The tabacoo is wrapped on the leaf and rolled to form a shape of a cigarette or bidi. With the easy availability of cigarette and bidis in the market, smoking of tabacco through this method has lessened. Betal nut, *'Kove'* and betal leaf, *'Bithi'* or *'Bikron'* added with a little lime is chewed. They also chew the bark of trees called *'Ingtat', 'Arkeng'* and *'Arhi'*.

The Karbi boys and girls play several traditional games. The game of *'Hambi'* where a hard round seed of a tree found in the jungle is used. The game of top spinning *'Phelong'* is a favourite among the young boys. *'Kengdongdang'* is a game of balancing act where two bamboo sticks are used. Partcipants climb on top of the bamboo and a race is performed. Games are played by boys and girls. Riddles are played both by young and old. Wrestling, Tug-of-war, and pushing of a stick by two opponents or more are favourites among older boys and young men.

In addition to agricultural implements, weapons like knife, dao, spear, bows and arrows are used as offensive and defensive weapons. Shields are made with the hide of animal skins. A piece of bamboo tied with two strings which look like a bow called *'Bapthaili'* is used for hunting small birds and chasing of monkeys in the jhum. The bow like *'Bapthaili'* is shot at a target with a handmade round dry mud and marbles. The Autonomous Council Authority and now the Deputy Commisioner issues licence on single barrel and double barrel guns. The gun is a prestigious item of defence and the one who owns, really feel proud of it.

Dance and music plays an important part in the Karbi society. Various traditional dances are performed by the youths on special occasions. During the socio-religious festival *'Chomangkan'* or *'Chomkan'*, a dance called *'Nimso Kerung'* is performed by young boys and girls. This dance is the only one where boys and girls come to a close embrace. In some areas the faces of the girls are covered while in others their faces are not covered while dancing. *'Chong Kaching nang'* a form of war dance is also performed by young boys during the *'Chomkan'* festival. Shield and sword are used in the dance. *'Rit Nong Chingdi'* is a dance which depicts the Jhum cultivation. Both boys and girls perform this dance. *'Hacha Kekan'* is a post harvest dance performed by the boys. *'Banjar Kekur'* is a dance which depicts the Karbis encounter during their exodus from the Navel of the Earth to the present place. The traditional songs whether folk or religious are generally, sang by experts who are endowed with sweet voices. A male singer is called *'Lunsepo'* and a female singer, *'Lunsepi'*. Dirge

singing *'Kacharhe'* is sung only by the female singer called *'Uchepi'* or *'Charhepi'*. The *'Lodetpi'* is a female diviner who invokes the spirit and perform occult rites.

The Karbis have a very limited number of musical instruments. A big drum called *'Cheng'* is their main musical instrument. It is generally played by a master drummer called *'Duhuidi'*. They also use small drum called *'Cheng Burup'*. Flute used by them are of two kinds. The wooden flute is called *'Muri'* and the bamboo version is called, *'pongsi'*. *'Krongchui'* is a musical instrument made with a strip of bamboo and a thread is tied into it for playing. A trumpet is also made by them with the horn of a dead buffalo.

Religion : Charles Lyall and Tanmay Bhattacharjee have dealt elaborately on the religion of the Karbis. According to them the Karbis have no idols, temples or shrines.[87] The Karbis according to Lyall have borrowed from the Hindu Assamese the ideas and the names of *'Baikuntho'* (Vaikuntha, Vishnu's Paradise) and *'Norokot'* (Naraka, Hell; but these conceptions do not play much part in their views of a life to come.[88] Better known as *'Jom Recho'* or *'Chom Recho'* (*Jam* or *Yama Raja*) the Lord of the Dead with whom the dead remain in his abode called 'Jom Arong' or *'Chom Arong'*. Elaborate ceremonies in memory of the dead *'Chomkan'* or *'Chomangkam'* or *'Thi Karhi'* are the means by which the spirit of the dead gain admittance to the abode of *'Chom'*.

The Hindu Gosains or priests of Assam have hitherto succeeded in converting to Hinduism only those Mikirs residing on the plains or adjacent low hills. On conversion they enter the class termed *'Koch'* and are allowed to retained all their customs, the priests being satisfied with the yearly contributions derivable from these disciples, regardless of their principles, they are however required to give up the use of spirituous liquour and in lieu they acquire the pernicious habit of eating opium.[89]

The Karbis religious rituals specially the Dead Ceremony, are said to have been prepared by a man, *'Thireng Vangreng'* (Literally, 'Dead alive, come alive). This man is said to have travelled between this world and the abode of the dead. Thus, his knowledge of the abode of the dead provoked him to prepare the rules of funeral ceremonies. It is said that for the last time he did not come back from the abode of the dead. According to *Thireng*

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87. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs*, P-30 and Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis,* P-133

88. Ibid, P-28.

89. Opcit, A.J. Moffat Mills, '*Report on Assam'*, P-CXXXIV.

Vangreng, everything is different in Jom's city. He saw the people there go out to fish, and gather instead pieces of stick. They ask him why he did not gather them too; he answered that these were not fish but sticks. Then they waved over them and he saw them as fish. The dead do not stay in Jom's City, *'Chom Arong'* forever. They are born again as children and this goes on indefinitely. The coming back of the dead to life through birth which is called, re-incarnation or rebirth has a strong Hindu and Buddhist stamp. But unlike the Buddhist and Hindu theory of re-incarnation where the status of the dead person coming back to life depended upon his past deeds, *'Karma',* the Karbi idea of rebirth is simple. That is, since a person died as a human, he/she should come back to life as a human being.

The rebirth, *'Men Kevang'* in Karbi is strongly embedded in the belief of the Karbis. But it is possible only within the clan. A person can not take rebirth in others clan. The Karbis practice exogamous marriage and maintain purity of descent among the clans. A Karbi female retains the surname of her father's clan even after marriage. A female thus, who belong to the descendent of the father, must also take rebirth into the line of her father's clan born as a daughter. It is believed that a re-born individual inherits the character of the deceased and fulfills the announcement made before his or her death.

The concept of rebirth *'Men Kevang'* of the Karbis shares similar traits to the Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Island in South Eastern Alaska and the Pulangka community of Thailand.[90] The features of announcing dreams which indicate who is to be reborn and the similarity of behaviour between a child and the deceased person are such similar traits. The belief in rebirth is so deeply rooted among the Karbis that the Karbi Christians too continue to believe and practice according to the traditions of the tribe. Another point to note is that a dead person comes back to life in several of his family members.

The Karbis believe that a person before dying chooses his future parents by rebirth through a verbal declaration. Announcing dream is also attached importance in identifying the identity of the new born. Such kinds of dreams usually occur during pregnancy. In case of sexual deformity in a baby, the belief is that the person in his or her previous life was not satisfied with his or her sexual orientation and declared before dying that he or she would be born as the member of the opposite sex. Such person as per the belief used to be born with sexual deformities and is considered a taboo. A sexually deformed child in the past used to

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90. Opcit, Dharamsing Teron, and Elwin Teron, *Karbi Syudies* P-79

be abandoned in the wilderness to die.[91]

The identity of the new born is also established by correlating the behaviour of the child with a deceased person of the family. As the child grows up and develops speaking skill, he or she may exibit post infantile behaviour indicative of 'imaged memories' of previous personality. Many such cases were observed and the contributor of this article in 'Karbi Studies' narrated how his cousin as a child would speak of driving a vehicle and often shouted at his mother to give him a particular vehicle.[92] After confirming by the Karbi Shaman, 'Thekere' the identity of the boy was established. There was another case of a child who inspite of being physically normal acted as a lame. Later on, it was established that he was a rebirth of a person who was lame. *(I also presented my own case as told by my mother and father. A person of my family line was cremated without giving him the silver bangles that he used to wear when he was alive. When I was born, I often used to look at my hands as if I was looking for the missing bangles that the previous person used to wear. My parents had to order a new pair of bangles for me and the looking at the hands stopped after I wore the pair of bangles. I was thus named after the person).*

A person devoured by wild animals like tiger can not be reborn at all. Such misfortunes are regarded as taboo. There are purification rituals for such unfortunate victim but he can not be reborn. Even the widow whose husband was devoured by a tiger was not allowed to remarry. A case of tiger devouring a man is called *'Longle Kerem'* meaning 'defeat of the soil' (Earth) or *'Pirthe Kelangno'* meaning, 'Bad days'. A wife becoming a widow from such an incident is called *'Me-ang'* literally, red (dangerous) widow. In case of a man whose wife was killed by a tiger would also apply the samething. The man would be called *'Me-angpo'*. But the soul of a person devoured by a tiger still lives as per the believe so he also would find a place in the *'Chomkan'* ritual where the dead souls of three generations of the family line are remembered and they are sent to the abode of *'Chom' (Jom)* or *'Chom-me, Phangme'* (Paradise). In the *'Sar Anthok'* ritual during *'Chomkan'*, dead souls of three generations are recalled and if the soul of a dead person devoured by a tiger happened to be within the group (three generation) a separate food is prepared for him or her. The food will be prepared with the left hand, the serving of the food is also with the left hand and the banana leaf where the food will be spread too would be turned upside down. The *'Anbor,'* food

91. Ibid, P-80

92. Ibid, P-80

wrapped by the banana leaf will be thrown at a distance by the left hand for the dead soul devoured by a tiger. The food prepared for such a person is called *'Anjam'*.

According to Tanmay Bhattacharjee, the Karbis believe in the multiplicity of gods.[93] They call the gods *'Arnam atum'* where 'atum' is the plural suffix. But one is to note here that in the beginning monotheism seems to be the basic idea of their belief. The only God to be worshipped was *'Hemphu'* who of course has a sister *'Rasinja'* and an associate *'Mukrang'*. *Mukrang* later associated himself in love with *'Rasinja'*. The three persons are revered and worshipped as one. In their sojourn and wanderings, gods both benevolent and malevolent are added to the list of pantheon and by the time they reach and stay in the present destination, *'Varche Varkong'* (Assam) many gods came to be worshipped by them. The Karbi gods according to Tanmay Bhattacharjee can be divided into two categories namely, gods to be propitiated and gods to be supplicated. The list of Karbi gods are:

1) *Hemphu* - (Lord, God origin)

2) *Mukrang* - (Lord)

3) *Rasinja* - (Goddess of Love)

4) *Peng* - (Protector)

5) *Rit Anglong* - (The agricultural God)

6) *Hemphu Anglong* - (The agricultural God)

7) Riso Arnam

8) Chinthong Arnam

9) Killing Arnam

10) Bilai Kareng

11) Than

12) Chomang Ase

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93. Opcit. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis,* P-133

13) Parok Arnam

14) *Arnam Pharo* - (The hundred Gods)

15) *Chojun Arnam* - (God of Heaven)

16) Mukrangpi

17) *Murti Chekema* (Satanic gods)

18) Langhe Rong Anglong

19) *Lore Sarpo (Loring Sarku)*

20) *Vo Prok, Vo Ang* (Elephant God)

21) Habit Ase (Dui Khrai)

22) Pirtoo

23) Parai

24) Longle Arnam

25) Sekube.

26) Ingru Ningtong

27) Henru Ehong

28) Nihang Nijang Ase

29) Dor

30) Rikangpi

31) Meipi

32) Longri Ase

33) Puthe Ningre

34) Arnam Avur

35) Karjong Avur

36) Hemphu Avur

37) Thengtop Epong

38) Ram Chong Katai Avur

39) Aroi Avur

40) Kona Avur

41) *Rek Anglong* (Mountain God)

42) *Arnam Kethe*.

'Hemphu' the Head of the house or Household God own all the Karbi people. Everybody can sacrifice to him at anytime and pray for deliverance from sickness. *'Mukrang'* is similar to *'Hemphu'* but slightly lower in dignity. *'Rasinja'* the sister of *'Hemphu'* is revered along with *Hemphu* and *Mukrang*. These three, the preserver of men are approached by the sacrifice of a cock or a he goat. *Hemphu* must be invoked first in every sacrifice being the peculiar owner of men.

'Arnam Kethe', inspite of his name which means, The Great God, has no definite authority over the other gods. He is a house God and is sacrificed once in three years, if no occasion of trouble arises mean while. A castrated pig is his appropriate offering. All families do not have *Arnam Kethe*, nor does he always come when invited. If a man is sick and the *Uche* (diviner) declares that *Arnam Kethe* wishes to join the household, the ceremony, is performed but no offerings are made at that time. After three years the castrated pig is killed and a general feast with rice, beer and liquour will be given to the villagers and relatives. The religious ritual or festival is called *'Cho-Jun'* meaning, eat and drink.

'Peng' is also a household God. His offering is a he goat which is sacrificed yearly in the *'Tikup'* or lawn of the house. Some neighbours are invited to the sacrificial feast. *Peng* is also sacrificed to in sickness. Maize, rice and along with the first fruits of the harvest are given

to him as offering. *Peng* and *Arnam Kethe* are two gods who only come to eat and many avoid taking them if they can.

'Rek Anglong' (mountain God) is a house God. He is worshipped in the field and only men eat the sacrifice. He is worshipped with a fowl or a goat once a year. Rek Anglong is the God of the hills with who the Karbis have to be at peace. But not every family in the village needs him.

'Arnam Pharo' the hundred, gods, take a hundred share of rice, betet nut and the red spathe of the plantain tree cut up. He is worshipped with a white he goat or a white fowl as the sacrifice. He and Rek Anglong figure particularly in the *'Rongker'*, the great Annual village religious ritual. It is celebrated before the beginning of the year's cultivation. *Arnam Pharo* seems to be a collective name of all the gods whom it may concern. Even the Goddess Kamakhya of Nilachal Hill near Guwahati is mentioned as one of the deities.[94]

The above mentioned gods are worshipped not for their malevolent character but are benevolent and are believed to be the repository of well being and peace. These gods are therefore to be supplicated.

As the Karbis live in wild terrain and so are exposed to various diseases. On the appearance of any epidemical disease among them they have recourse to sacrifices and if the wrath of the deities can not be appeased, that is, should the sickness not abate; they leave their houses and property and retire to the densest forest closing all communication with their former habitation. In the year 1834-35 the cholera-morbus raged throughout the hills and so alarm were the inhabitants that there was scarcely a single village that did not remove to a new sight.[95] They consider any kind of disease, as the work of God or gods and try to propitiate them. Therefore, all the gods under the propitiatory category are associated with diseases. Such as,

a. *Chomang Ase* - A Khasi God identical with Keche Ase, the God of Rheumatism.

b. *Ajo Ase* - The night fever. He is the deity of Cholera.

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94. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs,* P-32.

95. Opcit, A.J. Moffat Mills, '*Report on Assam'*, PP-CXXXIII-CXXXIV.

c. *Keche Ase* - The God of Rheumatism.

d. *So meme* - The God of barrenness in women.

e. *Thengthon or ok Langno* - God of the recurring disease.

According to Edward Stack, the gods who are associated with diseases are as follows:

a) *Phunkang* - The swollen throat (Goitre)

b) *Ingthuk* - Stone in gall bladder.

c) *Pok Kangsir* - Diarrhoea.

d) *Keche Ase* - Rheumatism

e) *Bab Ase* - Neuralgia

f) *Pi Amir* - Small pox

g) *Si-i* - Leprosy

h) *Man Arak* - White leprosy

i) *Kengtong* - Elephantiasis

j) *Pok Kapavi* - Bleeding of belly, blood dysentary.

Lunse Timung a prominent Karbi writer has listed One Hundred and Fifteen gods and goddesses which are divided by him into four distinct groups. They are:

(1) *Hem Angtar* (Gods of household): The gods of household are worshipped every year or at the end of some years. The gods and goddesses under this group are:

1) *Hemphu* - God of Universe

2) *Mukrang* - Associate God of Hemphu

3) *Rasinja* - Associate goddess of Hemphu

4) *Peng* - The Protector

5) *Rit Anglong* - God of agriculture

6) *Cho-Jun* - Worship of the God of Heaven

7) *Chinthong Arnam* -

8) *Bilai Kereng* -

All deities except the God of Heaven are worshipped once in a year. The *'Chojun'* religious festival is the greatest among all the household religious festivals. It is held at an interval of two to three years. *'Vophong'* identified as Indra, the God of Heaven is the prime Deity. The other deities are *'Arpi'* (Rudra) and *'Birno'* (Agni). In addition to these three, other minor deities are also worshipped in the *'Chojun'* religious festival. In this festival the close relatives of the performer, brothers and sisters, *'Korte Muti, Ingjir Arlo'*, nephews and nieces, *'Osa,' Phili'* and maternal uncles, *'Ong*', *(Nihu)* take part. All the guests who come to take part bring at least a bottle of wine. The gods are invoked and all pray for the welfare of the family of the performer. Fowls and pigs are sacrificed during the three day festival. It is performed in the outdoor, most preferably an open field. The function is conducted at the direction of the *'Kurusar'*, the Priest. The offerings which are given to the deities are not touched by anybody other than the Priest and the performer. If the wine kept on the earthen pot is dried up, it is a bad omen. The festival ends with a collective feast, in the house of the performer.

(2) *Rongker* (Collective religious ritual for the welfare of the village): The *Rongker* religious festival is held every year in the village collectively by the villagers. The festival is of three types:

a) *Pirda Rongker,* b) *Ajo Rongker,* c) *Vophong Rongker*.

Pirda Rongker is held in the day time at some distance from the village. Women are not allowed to participate in it. The *Ajo Rongker* is held at night. It is held to ward off diseases from the village. The *Rongker,* unlike the *Chojun* does not have a priest to conduct the ritual. The people collectively offer their prayers to the presiding deities for the welfare of all.

(3) *Dengja* or *Deuri Ase*: The *Dengja* is the presiding deity of animals. He is the King of animals. The *Dengja* protects the tribe from wild animals of the jungle. The festival is

carried out on regional basis. Only a person belonging to the Teron clan is permitted to conduct the ritual.

(4) ***Thengpi, Thengso*** **(Gods who preside over disease):** The rituals performed for these gods are treated as first aids or first step. The blessings of the deities are invoked for the cure of the disease. Suitable offerings are given when one sustains injury or sickness. As the number of diseases is innumerable, the corresponding number of gods is also innumerable. *'Avur'* means a particular disease affecting many people taking the form of an epidemic. On the other hand the *'Ase'* is the disease presiding deity for a single person.

Besides gods and goddesses in persons, the Sun and the Moon are venerated by them. Almost all mountains, springs and river, waterfalls etc are considered to be the abode of gods.

The role of Lodetpi in curing diseases: A long suffering from a disease by a person is considered a wrath from God. To propitiate the God who is responsible for the suffering, a lady who is well versed in the art of recitation is sought. The *'Lodetpi'* as she is called, seeks the mercy and forgiveness of God through continuous incantations. Her offerings include betel nuts and betel leaves on a plate.

The Lodetpi sits on the bamboo mat and keeps a *'Bongkorok*'; a skull in her hands. Both her palms are opens infront and kept close to each other. The *Lodetpi* chants the names of gods and she experiences a little trembling. After that, a series of questions are asked and the *Lodetpi* answers them. In the ritual the God who is responsible for the disease is requested to go away from the patient. Sometimes, some persons are suspected to have evil designs upon the patient by commiting sorcery. According to Lyall to bewitch a person, it is necessary to have some of his hair, or a piece of his cloths; these are buried with an egg, some bones and some charcoal *(Lopeng)*.[96]A good *Lodetpi* can produce these things by the power of her inspiration *(Lopeng Kephur)*. When the things buried by means of witchcraft are recovered, the spirit *'Karjong'* of the sufferer returns with them and he gets well.

Witchcraft and sorcery is practised exclusively by the Karbis. A quarrel or jealousy on the person is reasons to use the media of witchcraft inorder to eliminate the person. A live fish of the *'Cheng'* variety in Assamese, *'Ok Langso'* in Karbi is inserted inside the stomach of the person through witchcraft. When a person through witchcraft dies, such live fish, *'Ok*

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96. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs,* P-36.

kerang' comes out from the stomach of the person during cremation. The villagers of Tai-ik pi near Tika hills still used to narrate a case of witchcraft. Langtuk Teron, the Headman of Tai-ik pi village entered into a land dispute, *'Havar Kachithi'* with the Headman of nearby village called, 'Rong Ali'. The Headman of Rong Ali used the medium of witchcraft against Langtuk Teron. But Langtuk Teron and his family members were not affected by it. It is said that if the *'Rahi'* (spirit) of a person is powerful, no witchcraft can affect him. But unfortunately, many of the villagers of Langtuk Teron died. Finding no option, Langtuk Teron decided to consult a Shaman and visited his house. The Shaman who is also his friend told him to go back to his village because the person who is responsible for this act is already dead. While coming back to his village from the Shaman's house he met some people with a bottle of wine in their hands. Langtuk Teron asked them where they are going and they replied that they are going to attend the funeral of a person who died the previous night. Langtuk Teron remembered the Shaman's advice and he came to know the real culprit that caused misfortune in his village. After a week, the Shaman came to Langtuk Teron's house and retrieved through his power the wrapper, *'Lopeng'* containing some hair, his own piece of cloth and others from the soil, [97] *(I also want to add my experience of such case which happened in our house. I was about fifteen years old. It happened that one day one of the pigs reared by my mother had a swollen testicle and the pig died after few days. Out of curiosity, I cut and opened the swollen portion and found to my disbelief that some pieces of hair and charcoal were found inside it. Some years back, our hen who was suffering used to make a strange noise at night because of the pain. The hen died and when cut we found the liver extra-ordinarily big weighing almost a kilogram. It is said that misfortune first strike the pet animals, be it dogs, cats, cows, fowls etc. If any of the pet animals die through the medium of witchcraft, the owner is saved as the pet animal out of love and affection for his master preferred to die so that his master lives. This is the belief of the Karbis)*.

According to Tanmay Bhattacharjee, witchcraft has a great hold over the whole society.[98] The people who are affected by it perform the remedial measures by spending the last paisa. In 1973 Tanmay noticed that a patient was not taken to the nearest Hospital for treatment and his family members tried in vain to propitiate the God through the *Lodetpi*. Unfortunately, the patient died. Some thirty years back, the Karbis hardly take the patients to

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97. Opcit, An interview with Samsing Teron and also the villagers of Tai-ik-pi

98. Opcit, Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis,* P-139

the hospitals. They instead perform the Pujas and waste precious moment for treatment. In our surroundings, I too can still recall how my parents request the people to take the sick person to the Doctor. Now only, realisation came that along with propitiation to a God or gods visiting a doctor when one gets sick is necessary.

Along with the service of the Lodetpi in curing deseases, caused by sorcery, traditional practitioners for curing general diseases are prevalent. Charms or spells, *'Pherem'* in Karbi are much used for medicinal purposes. The knowledge of *'Pherem'* is handed down from father to son basis. The spells are procured through dreams. For an ordinary stomach-ache, '*Pok Kachokor'* a little mud rubbed on the abdomen with a muttered spell is the specific. For rheumatism, *'Keche Ase'* a Castor-oil leaf is struck on the place and a spell muttered; if it fails, sacrifice must be offered to the God, *'Keche Ase'* who is responsible for the disease.

Medicinal Knowledge: The Karbis use herbs, fruits and bark of trees for preparing medicines. The bite of snakes of all varieties can be cured by using known herbs and roots. In 1984, a Seventh Day Adventist Christian Missionary Mr Amos Bazroy was bitten by a viper of the green variety. He was immediately taken to a person named, Rongphar Jonthi who has the knowlegde of curing snake bite. Mr Bazroy was pasted with a pulp of a known root of a creeper and after sometime, he gained consciousness. When asked, Mr Bazroy replied that when the snake bites him the pain was like a hot burning charcoal placed on the skin but when the medicine was pasted on the site of the wound, it acted like cold ice. Unfortunately, Rongphar Jonthi who cured Mr. Amos Bazroy is no more but his son inherited the knowledge from him. A research on the traditional medicines of the Karbis will definitely bring important contribution to modern treatment of diseases.

The art of divination: A sickness of long duration is frequently attributed to witchcraft, *'Maja'* or *'Mintor' 'Minsin'*. To know the author of the spell or the God or Demon who has brought the trouble must be propitiated and the services of a diviner are necessary. The *'Uche'* and feminine *'Uchepi'* are called to take care of such misfortune. The *Uche* and *Uchepi* are of two grades - the humbler and the higher. The former is called *'Sang Kelang Abang',* a man who tells the omen by 'looking at the rice'. The latter, invariably, a woman is the *'Lodet'* or *'Lodetpi'*. In serious sickness or distress the latter is called and in an ordinary and less important occassion, the former.[99]

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99. Opcit, Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs,* P-34

The omen teller, *'Sang Kelang Abang'* picks out the unbroken grains of rice, *'Sang'* and places them in fives and tens in pentacle or other fashion. He then counts by couples. If in the groups the odd numbers predominate, the omen is good. If there are no odd grains over it is very bad. Then all are swept together again and arranged in three or four heaps. Each heap is counted out, a God being named and if after the counting, again by couples, three single grains remain, the God named is the one to be propitiated. If three grains do not remain, the process is tried again. Sometimes, cowries *'Sobai'* are used instead of rice in the same way.

Another mode of divination is to arrange in a circle, equidistant from a point marked on the board, *'Inghoi'* as many little heaps of clay as there are gods suspected in the case, each heap being called by the name of the God. An egg is then sharply thrown into the middle of the board at the marked point. When it breaks and the yolk is scattered, the clay heap which recieves the largest splash of yolk or towards which the largest and longest splash points, indicates the God responsible for the affliction.

A long handled sword, *'Nokjir'* is also used in divination. The sword is held upright in the hand. It shakes of itself when the charm is recited and the sword becomes inspired. The holder asks whether the sick person will recover, and goes over the names of the possibly responsible gods and the sword shakes at the right answer and name.

The *Lodetpi*, female diviner is an ordinary woman not belonging to any particular family or clan. She feels the divine afflatus and when it is upon her, yawns continually and calls out the names and the will of the gods.

Oaths and Ordeal: Inorder to proclaim the innocence of a person against certain charges framed against him or her, oaths are administered by the people, specially, by the village council. In such a case, the *'Uche'*, diviner is called and he will conduct the proceedings. Earth is put on the head of the person and will say, "May I become like the dust". A tiger's tooth is scraped and the scraping drunk in water, "May the tiger eat me". Similarly, the elephant tusk is scraped and the scraping drunk in water, "May the elephant trample me to death". Sometimes, the copper ring worn by the *Uche* is dipped in water, and the water drunk, "May I be melted like molten copper".

The administration of justice is carried in the lowest level by the Headman and in the highest level by the *'Lindokpo'* the traditional King. He is assisted by other subordinate officers. When a case arises, evidence is collected and the case is proved. If the accussed

denies the allegations, he is asked to take an oath called *'Seme'* in Karbi. For this purpose the *Uche* is called. The *Uche* is much venerated in the society because he knows the spell to subdue wild animals specially tigers. In the past attacks by tigers were a menace and much feared by the Tribe. An attack by wild animal was considered as a bad omen and if a person was killed by a wild animal, misfortune fell on the family and instead of standing by the side of the family in such hour of crisis, the family often get social boycott. No person would try to utter untruth before an *Uche* because he has the power to let loose an animal on a person who did not speak the truth.In giving the Oath, to the accused, the *Uche* would repeat the story of the God of justice in low tone first. Then he would raise his voice slightly and say "you tiger, you elephant, and all the agencies of nature, you all the judge of the accused person. We have surrendered this person to you for trial. If you find him guilty, punish him suitably." But the *Uche* first warn the accused plainly that it is better to speak the truth and escape with lighter punishment instead of being punished heavily for practising falsehood. There is a firm belief amomg the Karbis that the oath would take its own action and if the accused has done something wrong, he would be punished by the agencies of nature.

The *Uche* in the olden days played a notable part in the administration of justice and played the part of a jury. He was respected for his knowledge. It is also believed that he is endowed with supernatural powers which enabled him to tame wild animals in deep jungles and entertain them with food consisting of meat, salt and rice.[100]

The *Uches* are reducing in number but the popular faith still persists and this perhaps explains why cases taken to the Court of the Deputy Commissioner and S.D.O (Civil) are so few. The Karbis generally do not go to the court and settle disputes by traditional method through the medium of the *'Mai'* which they consider free from all doubts.

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100. Opcit, Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis,* P-144.

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